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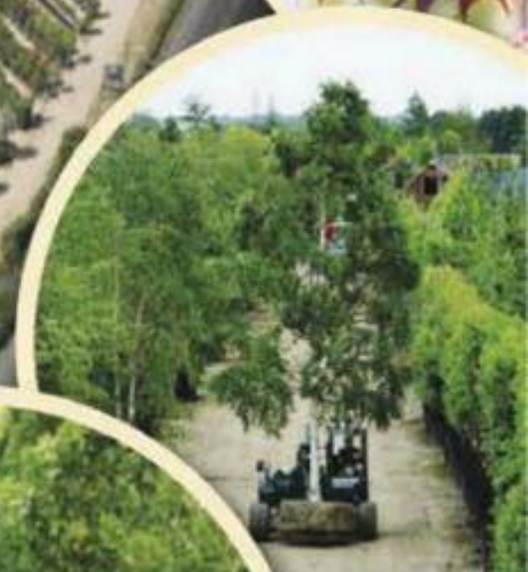

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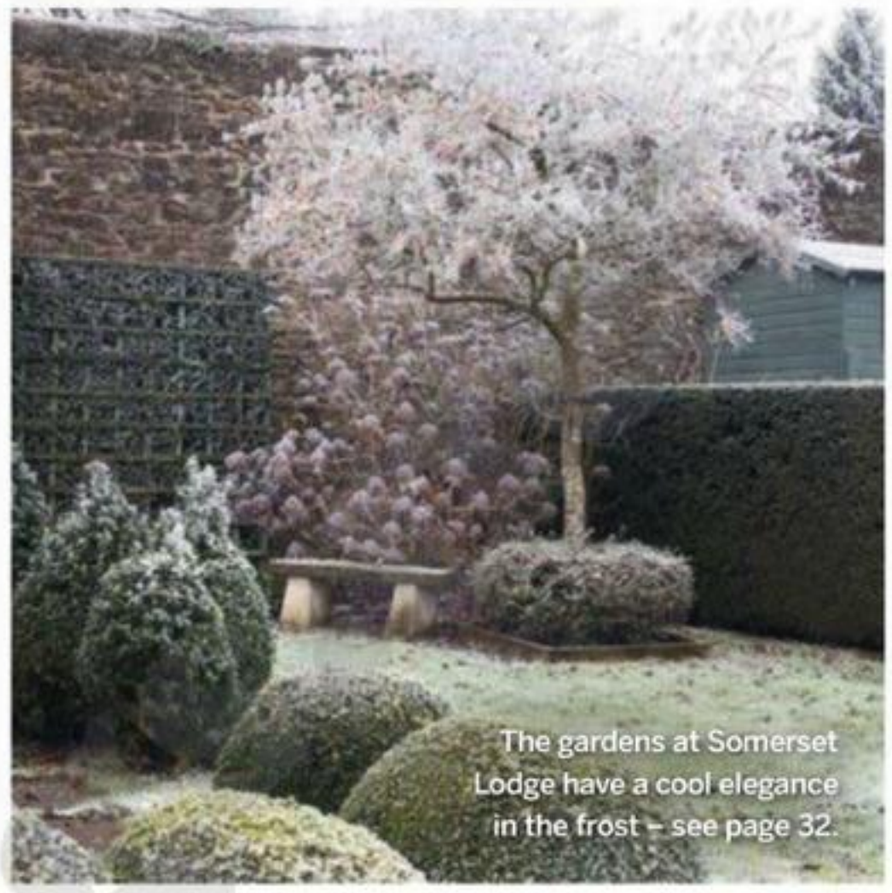
editor's letter

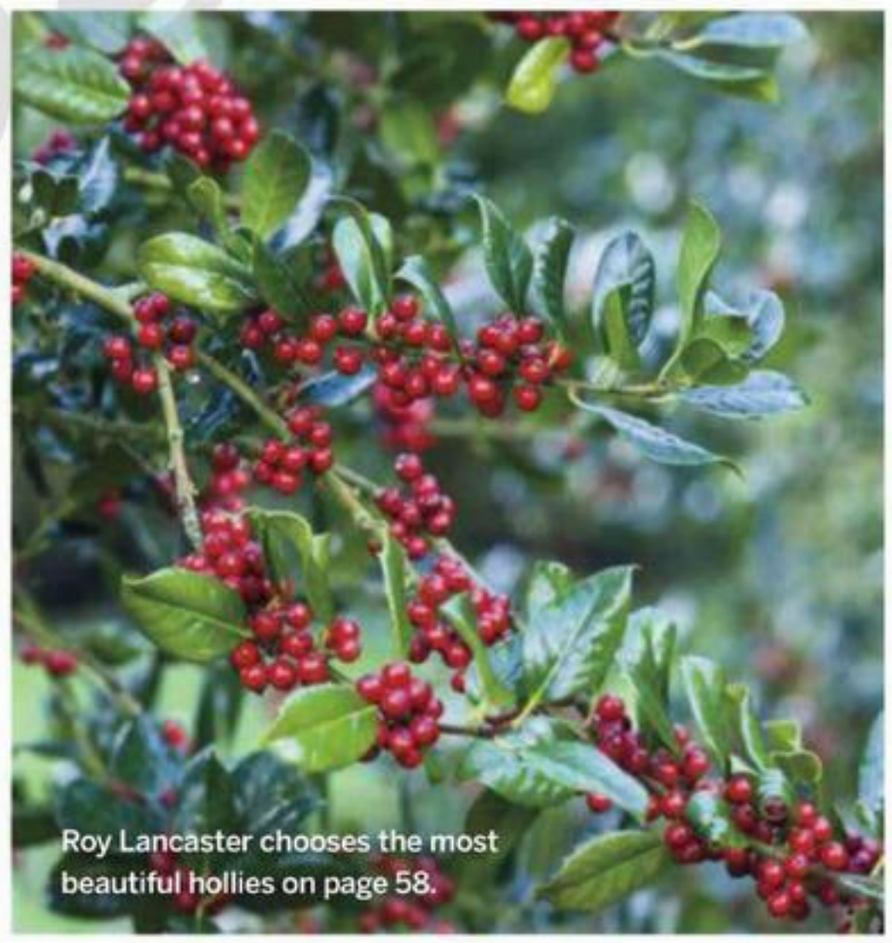
However much you love gardening, winter is best spent indoors surrounded by your favourite seed catalogues and dreaming of the season ahead. But looking out of cold window panes, it lifts the spirits no end to see some structure and clever planting that comes into its own at this time of year. This issue we visit Somerset Lodge (page 32) and Mount St John (page 46) for inspiring ideas that will help you achieve this. Roy Lancaster is a big fan of hollies and, on page 58, this master plantsman picks out some of his favourites. For my part, I am utterly enchanted by hellebores and thanks to the work of plant breeders, there is now a wealth to choose from. On page 36 we ask Nigel Rowland, who specialises in rare and unusal plants for shade, to select his dozen must-haves. We also feature some delicious recipes for Christmas (page 40) and great ideas for hand-crafted decorations (page 54). Many of you will have read that GARDENS ILUSTRATED, along with a number of other magazines, has been sold by the BBC. Our new owner is IMMEDIATE MEDIA, and the team and I are very excited about our future. Rest assured that our remit is unchanged and we will continue to bring you the most beautiful gardens and inspirational planting ideas from around the world.

I hope you enjoy the issue,

Juliet



The gardens at Somerset Lodge have a cool elegance in the frost – see page 32.



Roy Lancaster chooses the most beautiful hollies on page 58.

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LYNN KEDDIE, JASON INGRAM

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Helleborus x *hybridus* 'Violetta', photographed by Howard Sooley. See feature on page 36.

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MARIANNE MAJERUS

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GARDENS ILLUSTRATED, Immediate Media Company Bristol Limited, Tower House, Fairfax Street, Bristol BS1 3BN.

WWW.GARDENSILLUSTRATED.COM

IMMEDIATE MEDIA CO

Formerly BBC Magazines, Origin Publishing and Magicalia

THIS MAGAZINE IS OWNED AND PUBLISHED BY IMMEDIATE MEDIA COMPANY BRISTOL

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Standard subscription rates: UK £47.88 per annum; Eire and Europe £49.97; rest of the world £59.97. Distribution Frontline, Peterborough. US distribution Source IPD/Speedimpex. Email intlquery@seymour.co.uk Printed in the UK by William Gibbons Ltd. GARDENS ILLUSTRATED (ISSN 0968-8920) (USPS 015-608) December 2011 is published monthly by Immediate Media Company Bristol, Tower House, Fairfax Street, Bristol BS1 3BN, UK. Distributed in the USA by Evergreen Marketing, 116 Ram Cat Alley, Suite 201, Seneca, SC 29678-3263. Periodicals postage paid at Seneca, SC and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to GARDENS ILLUSTRATED, PO Box 421133, Palm Coast, FL 32142-1133 USA.

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Contributors

MARY KEEN

A garden designer and regular contributor to *The Telegraph* and *The Garden*, Mary's favourite project remains her Gloucestershire garden, which opens to groups and for the NGS. She recommends her all-time favourite gardening books on page 90.

"I enjoyed dawdling through my books and remembering how much they meant to me at times in my gardening life."

ANDREW MONTGOMERY

Originally trained in fine art, Andrew is now a photographer who regularly contributes to numerous magazines including *House & Garden* and *Country Living*. His pictures accompany Tony Kirkham's feature on how to plant trees, on page 72.

"The day with Tony was fantastic. I planted a sapling recently, putting into practice everything he showed me."

NIGEL ROWLAND

Having graduated in botany, Nigel trained at Wisley before opening Long Acre Plants in Somerset, which specialises in unusual plants, especially shade-loving ones. These include a large range of hellebores, the subject of Nigel's feature on page 36.

"If hellebores flowered in June they would not be so special – but in February, what a start to the year!"

JASON INGRAM

Based in Bristol, Jason travels widely photographing gardens, food and people for books and magazines including *Country Living* and *Gardeners' World*. His photographs of holly appear in our *Plant profile* on page 58 and his portraits of Mary Keen on page 90.

"Meeting Mary Keen and having the chance to photograph her in her own home was a real honour"

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letters

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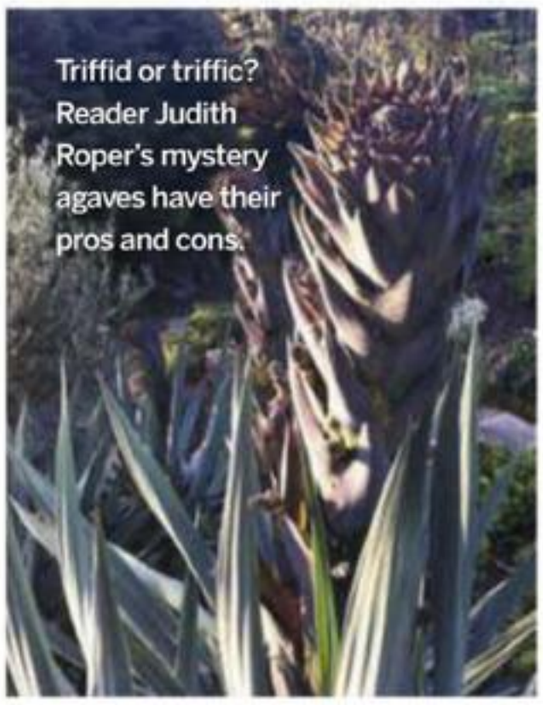
star letter

An unexpected crop

Scrabbling around in the weeds beneath my sprawling Cornelian cherry (*Cornus mas*) in early September, I glanced up to spy dozens of jewel-like scarlet fruit. I remember seeing the odd one or two in the past, but this autumn, the bush was dripping with fruit – a legacy of the warm, dry spring? Living in deepest, darkest Suffolk, I am passionate about using foraged or home-grown ingredients, and a quick search of the internet threw up a recipe for Cornelian cherry jam (at www.thefruitnursery.co.uk/recipes.html). The finished product gleams in its jars like the berries I spotted on the bush, and is fabulous on toast.

Janey Auchincloss, Lavenham, Suffolk

Cornus mas is often planted for its bright yellow flowers in February, but its fruit are delicious too.



Triffid or triffic? Reader Judith Roper's mystery agaves have their pros and cons.

Gardener's question

What's my mystery plant?

The agaves in part of my garden started as innocuous plants five years ago. Each year made steady progress until this spring they produced pulsating stems over 3m tall, with flower heads similar to *Agave americana* emerging from purple, overlapping leaves.

These beauties are not without their dark side, though. As their magnificent flowers mature, hundreds of seed pods (fertility rate 100 per cent) are released. Meanwhile the adults begin a slow death. Their hulking frames and roots are almost impossible to dislodge until decay over time weakens their structure.

Can you tell me the name of this *Agave* please?

Judith Roper, Nelson, New Zealand.

• Judging from the pictures you sent, the plant is likely to be *Agave tequilana*, a species from Mexico, where it is used to make tequila.

James Compton, botanical adviser.

Reader recommends

For autumn colour

My favourite tree or shrub for autumn colour is *Amelanchier*. The autumn colours are fantastic: yellow-orange-golden-brown-green. And the colour changes very early in the season compared to other shrubs.

Not to forget the spring colours: hairy leaves that are almost bright lilac, and small white flowers. In summer we can enjoy the berries, which are delicious.

Amelanchier is a versatile shrub with so many qualities.

Dorthe Moesmand, Germany

Reader recommends

How about hessian?

Yet again I find myself agreeing with Frank Ronan when he writes 'I hate gardens that are full of fleece and plastic and look like rubbish dumps all winter' (issue 178, page 114). So I am not the only one.

This winter I have decided to do something to improve the appearance of my garden. I have wrapped the bubblewrap with hessian, sewing it into shape using an upholsterer's needle and jute garden twine. I am pleased with the result and think it will work well with a cloche on top. But soon I shall have to pull those awful fleeces over the top of my vulnerable larger plants.

There is a gap in the market here. It needs an enterprising soul to design and produce an effective and aesthetically pleasing solution to the protection of plants and pots from the dreaded combination of wetness and cold.

I hope my use of hessian is a sound one. I am waiting for next spring to see how both plants and pots fared over the winter.

Elizabeth Slatter, Surrey.

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Harrod HORTICULTURAL

Reader praise

Picture perfect

GARDENS ILLUSTRATED is sent to me as a gift and I get great pleasure from reading it each month. I look for Penny Bhadresa's prints illustrating Carol Klein's column and also Angela Harding's in Frank Ronan's *The Writer's Plot*. They are quite delightful. Thank you for including them.

Freda Rayner, London.

We reserve the right to edit correspondence. □

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NEWS COMPILED BY **SORREL EVERTON**

EXHIBITION

CULTIVATING CRAFTS

Twelve contemporary jewellers have been invited to create pieces in response to the art of print maker Angie Lewin – all inspired by a love of plants and gardens, for an exhibition titled *Cultivate*. Shown above is one of Angie's newest prints, *Lichen and Thrift*, along with brooches by Jessica Briggs. Other jewellers showing work include Laura Baxter, Ruth Tomlinson and Shona Carnigie. 26 Nov-14 Jan. The Bluecoat, College Lane Entrance, Liverpool L1 3BZ. Tel 0151 709 4014, www.bluecoatdisplaycentre.com

Italy 2012

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Susannah Sindall

APPLIQUE ARTIST

Susannah has been an applique artist and teacher of her craft for the last eight years. She made her first picture from an old liberty print dress which her daughter had grown out of, and gave it as a present to her mother-in-law.

She calls her work "art on a craft basis", using fabric like paint, creating rich and evocative images of the natural world. Delicate wildflowers, silken fish and ephemeral butterfles are captured brilliantly in this medium.

She is a member of the Crafts Council of Ireland, exhibiting her pieces regularly. Handcrafted original works make affordable and unique gifts for weddings christenings birthdays. Bespoke commisions a speciality.

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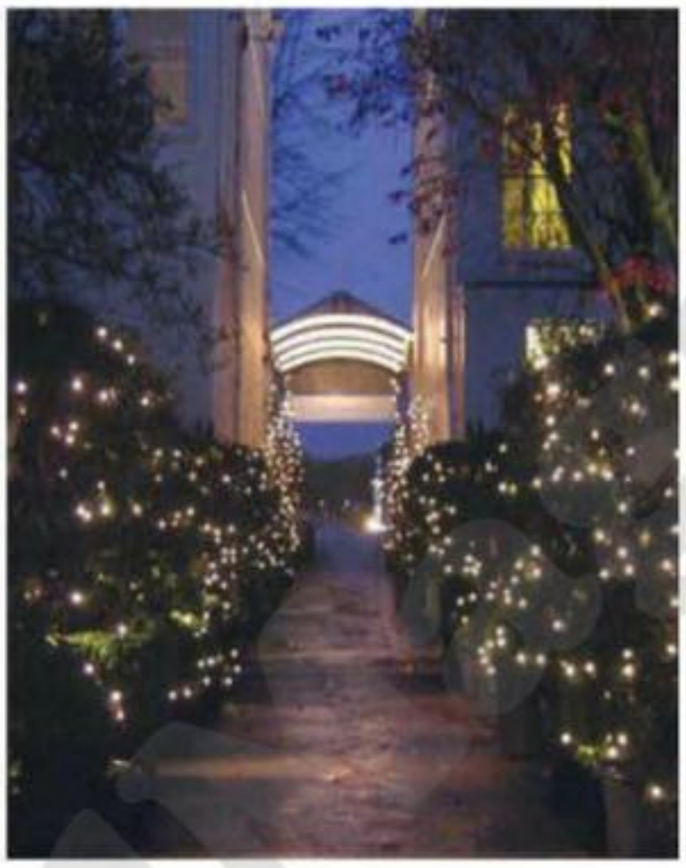
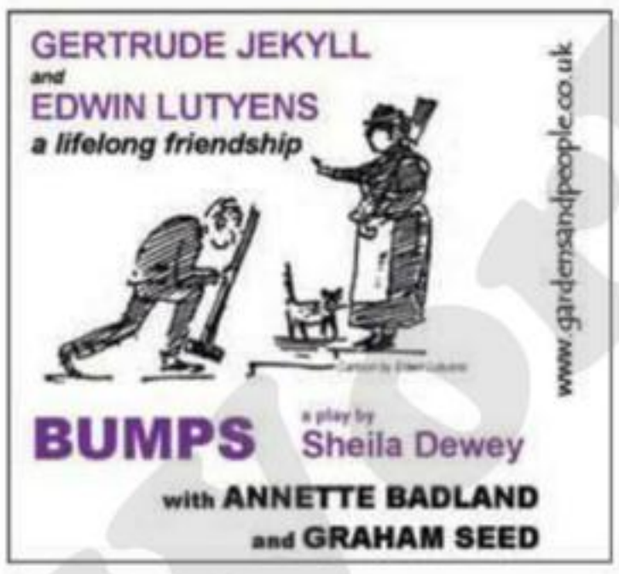
ONLINE NURSERY

Toby's favourite plants

Toby Buckland, the former presenter of *Gardeners' World*, has opened a new online plant nursery, run from the old Walled Garden of Powderham Castle in Devon. Offering a selection of perennials, flowers, grasses and roses, many of Toby's plants will be available bare-root – perfect for autumn and winter planting. "Bare-root planting has always been part of the rhythm of the gardening year, and while we will sell plants in pots during the growing season, gardeners can take advantage of winter dormancy to plant the old-fashioned way, more economically and with less waste," explains Toby. Tel 01626 867013, www.tobybuckland.com

Clifton Nurseries in central London hosts a Christmas market sparkling with stylish gifts for the garden and home. 2-4, 9-11, 16-18 December. 5A Clifton Villas, London W9 2PH. Tel 020 7289 6851, www.clifton.co.uk





Teatime story

The chance meeting between gardening greats Gertrude Jekyll and Edwin Lutyens at a tea party in Surrey is celebrated in *Bumps*, now available as an audio play. CD priced £14.99, from www.gardensandpeople.co.uk.

Next generation

Online gardening college My Garden School is to offer a new *Gardening for Kids* course. Led by *Blue Peter* gardener Chris Collins, the four-week course gives parents and teachers ideas on easy growing projects and ways to familiarise children with plants. www.my-garden-school.com

TV & radio

TELEVISION

• Bees, Butterflies and Blooms

BBC2. Sarah Raven's series looking at how we can all make changes to help pollinators is now due to be shown in the new year. Keep an eye out for details.

• Gardeners' World

BBC2, 16 December 8pm.

Christmas special featuring Monty Don and team with suggestions of seasonal tasks, tips on buying Christmas trees and keeping them looking fresh, ideas for natural decorations and a visit to Pam Ayres to talk about ways of looking after wildlife in the garden over winter.

RADIO

• Gardeners' Question Time

Fridays 3pm, BBC Radio 4 (repeated Sundays 2pm). Topical tips from the expert panel. Plus a visit to Kew's new high-tech bio security greenhouse and a review of the year's gardening stories.

Programme details correct at time of going to press but dates and times are subject to change. Please check TV and radio listings for up-to-date details.

NOSEY PARKER

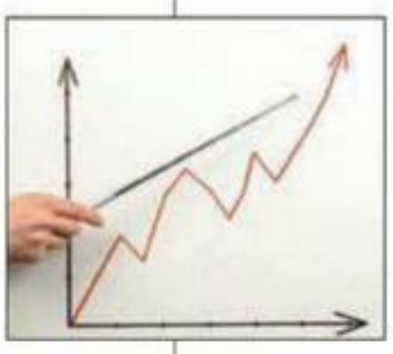
We ask inquisitive questions to gardening people

Colin Boswell

Colin has been growing garlic at The Garlic Farm on the Isle of Wight for over 30 years, recently travelling to Kazakhstan in search of garlic's ancient beginnings

What is your earliest garden memory? My mother had a vegetable garden at the back of the farmhouse where she encouraged me to grow radishes and lettuces – and garlic.

How did you become involved with horticulture as a profession? My father started his farming life after the war but quickly started to improve farm income with specialist crops – watercress, chicory, artichokes and sweet corn – which was a big success. I continued the offbeat vegetable production by growing garlic.



What training have you had? I did economics and agricultural economics at Nottingham University but never intended to be a farmer. I started in market research and advertising in London.

What do you consider the most memorable achievement of your career? Reaching a high point, losing virtually everything and starting again.

What is your top tip when it comes to growing garlic? Start with the best quality planting garlic and water it, water it and water it.

Which is your favourite garlic to grow? 'Solent Wight' – many gardeners enjoy growing 'hardneck' garlics, with their more exotic provenances, but spring-planted softnecks are by far the most versatile and longest-keeping.

Who would you most like to have dinner with, past or present? The retired Roman centurion who lived on the same site as us 1,700 years ago (we found his fibula brooch beside the farm).

Not a lot of people know this about me... When I was 11 years old, I entered my primrose wine in the village show and got first prize .

• Both autumn and spring-planting cultivars of garlic need a period of cold weather to break dormancy, which means that even spring cultivars can be planted as early as December. The Garlic Farm, tel 01983 865378, www.thegarlicfarm.co.uk

Diary

• **Christmas Floral Extravaganza** Flower display throughout Arley Hall, 3-9 December. Plus ideas from florist Carl Wilde, 6 Dec, 2pm and 7.30pm (£12.50 inc entry, booking essential), and table decoration workshop with Bill Dixon, 7 December, 10.30am-2.30pm (£30, booking essential). Other activities held during the week. Arley Hall & Gardens, Northwich, Cheshire CW9 6NA. General entry £7.50, 11am-5pm. Tel 01565 777353, www.arleyhallandgardens.com

• **Introduction to permaculture** Learn about the foundations of this approach to gardening. 9-11 December, from £182. West Dean, near Chichester, West Sussex PO18 0QZ. Tel 0844 4994408, www.westdean.org.uk/college

• **Christmas walks at Wakehurst** Festive walks highlighting seasonal plants around the gardens, and a chance to make Christmas wreaths (separate charge applies). 4, 11, and 18 December. £11, gardens open 10am, festive activities from 11.30am. Wakehurst Place, Ardingly, Haywards Heath, West Sussex RH17 6TN. Tel 01444 894066, www.nationaltrust.org.uk

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www.adoptaveg.org
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www.oxfam.org.uk/shop/oxfam-unwrapped-gardeners
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www.sendacowgifts.org.uk
Fund a Keyhole Garden in Africa as a gift – a revolutionary growing system that allows poor soil to support fruit and veg.

ROLF RICHARDSON / ALAMY, ANDRZEJ TOKARSKI / ALAMY

An apple on Christmas Day

Here's the perfect gift for the fruit-growing enthusiast. Apple 'Christmas Pippin' is being described as the 'new garden Cox'. It's a reliable, heavy cropper with sweet and aromatic apples, ready for harvest in October. Available from a range of suppliers including Pomona Fruits, which is offering cordons for £22.50. To find out more call 0845 676 0607, www.pomonafruits.co.uk.□

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Pelargonium sidoides

We cut back most of our pelargoniums in the autumn in order to give the plant a rest and to make space in the greenhouse. Each year we leave a few to flower over Christmas, and this is always one of them. The silvery-grey foliage and dark purple flowers make an elegant combination. Cuttings we took six months ago are now flowering and will be brought into the house over Christmas. In its native South Africa the plant is used as a remedy for coughs and colds. It is so effective that it has been taken up high street chemists.

HEIGHT/SPREAD **25cm x 25cm.**
ORIGINS **South Africa.**
CONDITIONS **Grow in a well-lit place indoors, in well-drained, loam-based compost.**
SEASON **June to December.**

December plants

Vivacious plants to illuminate your house and garden in midwinter

WORDS JOHN HOYLAND PHOTOGRAPHS RACHEL WARNE

John Hoyland is a plantsman, garden writer and owner of Pioneer Nurseries in Letchworth, Hertfordshire.

Viburnum tinus 'Eve Price'

In the search for unusual and exotic plants it is easy to become blind to the qualities of common-or-garden cultivars. *Viburnum tinus* is a ubiquitous shrub because it is tough, easy-to-grow and attractive. It needs no mollycoddling nor any special conditions to thrive. The leathery, dark green foliage is the perfect foil to the flat clusters of dusky pink buds and the white, starry, scented flowers. In the autumn it produces bunches of metallic-blue berries. I've seen it tightly clipped in columns, alternating with beech to make a striking formal hedge.

HEIGHT/SPREAD Eventually 2m x 2m.
ORIGINS Cultivar of a Mediterranean species.
CONDITIONS Any situation; well-drained soil.
SEASON Flowers December to March; berries in the autumn.

Helleborus x *ericsmithii* 'Winter Sunshine'

H. x *ericsmithii* has distinguished origins. Firstly, botanist Frederick Stern crossed *H. lividus* with *H. argutifolius* to produce the robust and attractive *H.* x *sternii*. Sixty years ago plantsman Eric Smith crossed this with the large white flowers of *H. niger*. The result was a jewel of a plant with lightly marbled foliage and pink-tinged, white flowers. Thanks to micro-propagation, attractive forms of this plant can be reproduced easily. This one is vigorous and has dark green leaves with a pewter sheen. The flowers are ivory-white, turning deep pink as they age.

HEIGHT/SPREAD 40cm x 35cm.
ORIGINS Garden hybrid.
CONDITIONS Rich, well-drained soil in part-shade.
SEASON December to March.

NEXT TIME
Nurseryman's favourites returns in February with the first of a new series by Chris Marchant of Orchard Dene Nurseries.

Heuchera 'Jade Gloss'

A bewildering choice of *Heuchera* hybrids is now available, and more are introduced each year. The claims made for their year-round attraction are often over-stated but I have found that this one stands up well to winter weather and keeps its colour better than most. The leaves are a glossy pewter colour with dark green veins. They are slightly concave, so you get glimpses of their reddish-purple undersides. The plant keeps its shape well but, like most heucheras, will develop a woody base after a few years and will need to be dug up and replanted.

HEIGHT/SPREAD 35cm x 25cm.
ORIGINS Bred by *Heuchera* specialists The Primrose Path.
CONDITIONS Well-drained soil in sun or part-shade.
SEASON Year-round.

Dryopteris affinis

As work in the garden slows down there is time during the winter to pause and examine plants that get overlooked during the rest of the year. Ferns tend to play a supporting role during the summer as a foil to more exuberant plants. But on mild winter days when they are illuminated by the low winter sun you can see the beauty of each individual leaf. What during the summer was a green mound becomes, on closer inspection, an intricate tracery of translucent green fronds. This species is evergreen during all but the harshest winters.

HEIGHT/SPREAD Up to 1m x 80cm.
ORIGINS British native.
CONDITIONS Cool, moist soil in dappled shade.
SEASON Year-round.

Euphorbia amygdaloides 'Purpurea'

Last winter a sheet of snow lay on the ground for weeks. In parts of the garden it was punctuated by mounds of purple foliage from this tough little euphorbia. The colour of the leaves changes dramatically with the seasons and during cold spells in midwinter it is deep purple. As the temperature rises in the spring, the foliage turns greener and bright acid-green bracts emerge. The plant has a reputation for self-seeding and running about. It does, but it can be easily controlled.

HEIGHT/SPREAD 50cm x 30cm.
ORIGINS The species is native to Britain and much of Europe.
CONDITIONS Poor dry soil in full sun or part-shade.
SEASON Year-round.

Places to visit

John Hoyland names some of his favourite gardens and other places to see plants at their best

Winter is a time for walking through woods and admiring landscapes. **The National Pinetum at Bedgebury** is home to the world's most comprehensive collection of conifers. In all there are 1,800 species of trees and shrubs from five continents, set among 300 acres of land. It is a magical place to stroll around, especially on bright, crisp winter days. The trees are given the space to grow as they would have in the wild, and the planting schemes underline just how beautiful conifers can be. Even a short avenue of mature *Leylandii* looks breathtaking. Bedgebury Road, Goudhurst, near Cranbrook, Kent TN17 2SJ.

MAURICE CROONS / ALAMY

National Pinetum, Bedgebury

Taxus baccata 'Icicle'

Conifers are no longer popular with gardeners, and when they have variegated foliage they have even fewer fans. So I know that I am in a minority when I say how much I like this variegated yew. It has a fastigiate habit and I keep it clipped to give some strong structure to the garden, especially now. In the winter the leaves have a white edge that turns gold during the summer. When I first bought the plants they were about 30cm tall and I understood that they would grow to 1m tall. Twelve years later they have reached 1.2m and I will keep them trimmed to that height.

HEIGHT/SPREAD 1.2m x 50cm.
ORIGINS Garden hybrid.
CONDITIONS Sun or part-shade in well-drained soil.
SEASON Year-round.

Hamamelis x *intermedia* 'Arnold Promise'

This witch hazel makes a magnificent shrub that is more compact and less unruly than some *Hamamelis*. The narrow, twisting petals form spidery flowers with a strong, sweet scent; they look fragile but are tough enough to withstand the iciest weather. This *Hamamelis* can also put up with a windy location, but it dislikes shallow, chalky soil, and waterlogged conditions will kill it, so it is always worth digging grit into the soil when you plant it.

HEIGHT/SPREAD Eventually 3m x 3m.
ORIGINS A hybrid of two Asian species; This cultivar was bred at Arnold Arboretum in Boston, USA.
CONDITIONS Well-drained soil in full sun or dappled shade.
SEASON December to March.

Cornus alba 'Sibirica'

Many shrubs have coloured stems but none is as easy to grow nor as dramatic as dogwood. *Cornus alba* 'Sibirica' has crimson stems that glow even on dull winter days; when the sun catches them they are dazzling. They look best planted in large groups, either by themselves or with groups of other dogwoods. *Cornus sericea* 'Flaviramea' (in the background of this picture) has olive-yellow stems and *Cornus alba* 'Kesselringii' has dark purple ones. The three of them planted close by each other create a magnificent picture.

HEIGHT/SPREAD 1.5m x 50cm.
ORIGINS From Eastern Europe to the Baltic, Russia, Mongolia and China.
CONDITIONS Full sun or dappled shade.
SEASON November to March.□

Tel 01580 879820, www.forestry.gov.uk/bedgebury

Studley Royal and Fountains Abbey covers 800 acres in North Yorkshire and is a Unesco World Heritage Site. The 18th-century canals, lakes and temples are surrounded by woodlands and a deer park, so there's plenty of space to get away from the crowds and enjoy a quiet winter walk. The ruins of the 12th century abbey are especially atmospheric. It is not a place you can rush around, so allow plenty of time for your visit. Ripon, near Harrogate, North Yorkshire HG4 3DY. Tel 01765 608888, www.fountainsabbey.org.uk.

In Fife, the **Cambo Estate** is best known for its snowdrops, but even before they flower the 70 acres of woodland are a beautiful place. The woodland garden is full of the scent of winter-flowering shrubs. If it is a fine day, follow the path along the burn through oak, beech and ash woods to reach the sea. Cambo House, Kingsbarns, St Andrews, Fife KY16 8QD. Tel 01333 450054, www.camboestate.com

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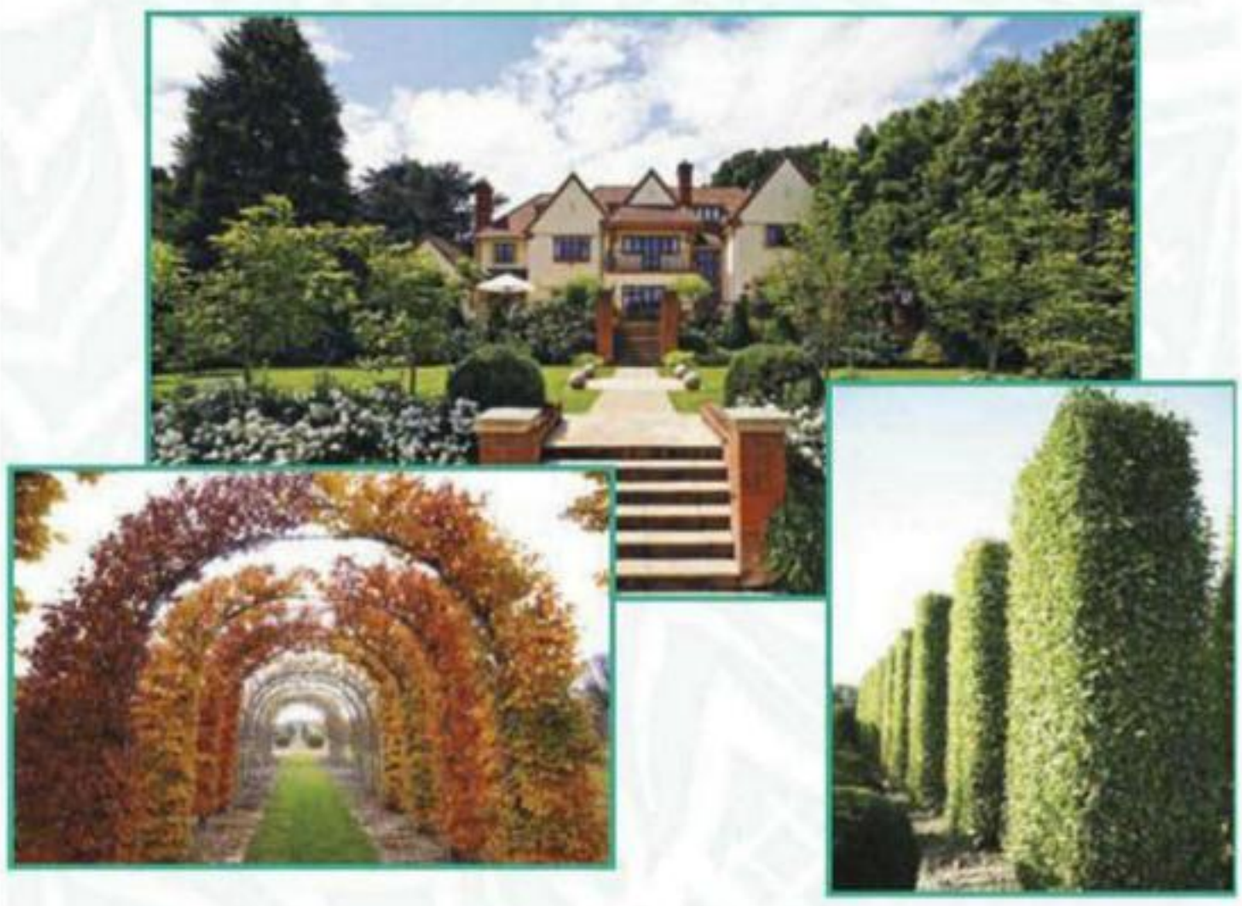

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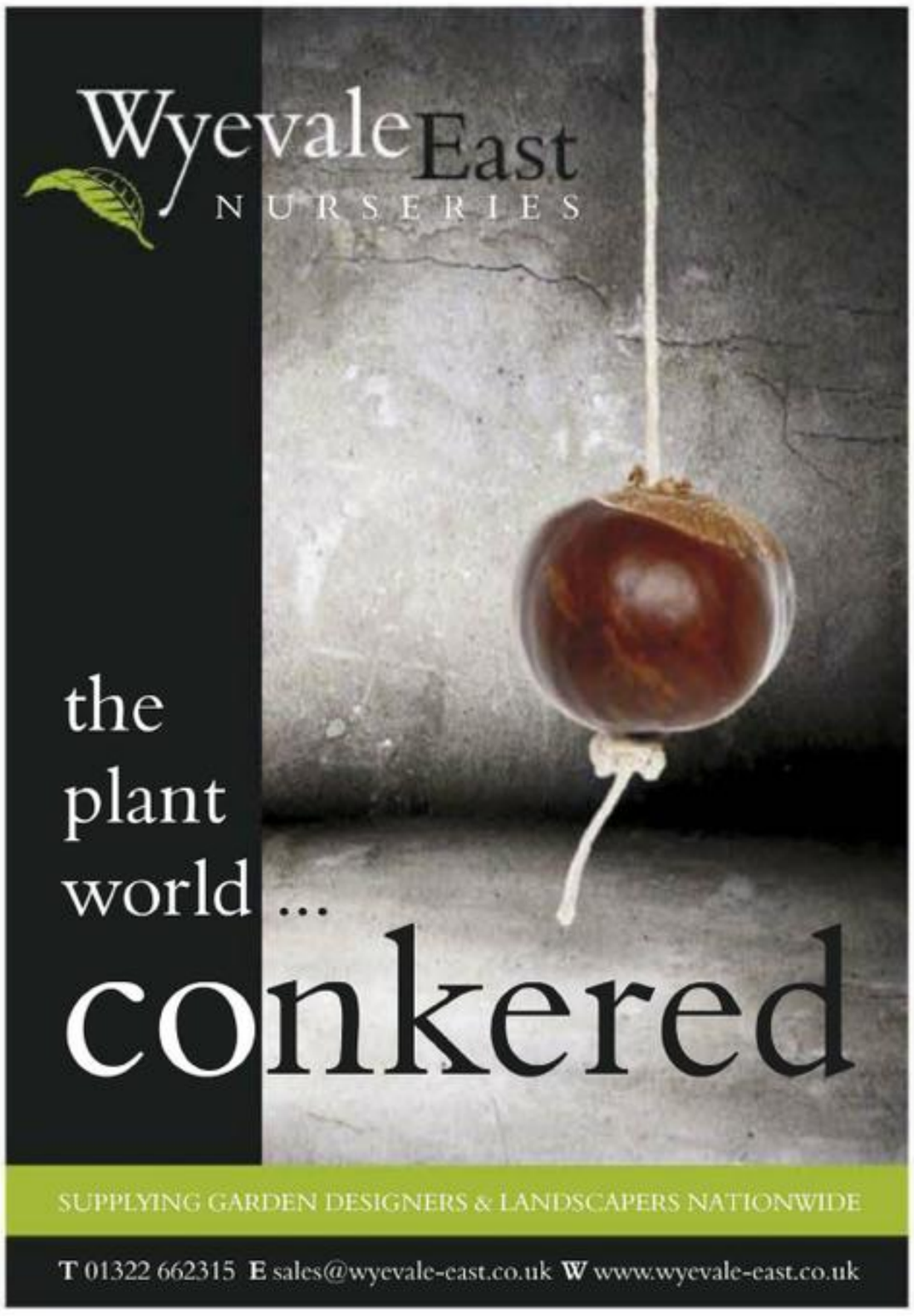

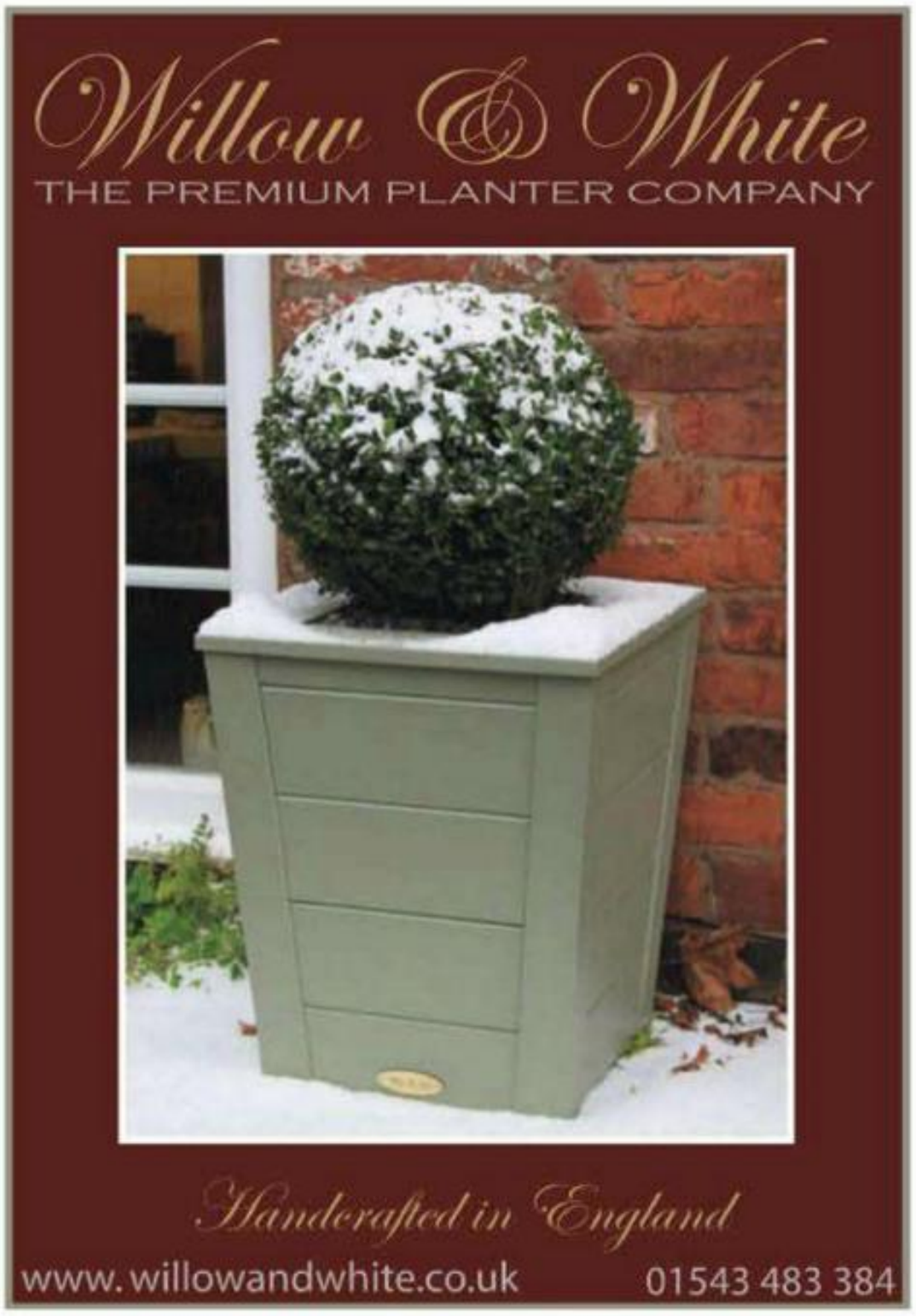

Force of nature

As the year ends and the cold weather sets in, even the hardiest gardeners must down tools and defer to Mother Earth

WORDS CAROL KLEIN ILLUSTRATION PENNY BHADRESA

PORTRAIT JONATHAN BUCKLEY

Carol Klein is a plantswoman, writer and presenter of *Gardeners' World* on BBC2

In some months you feel you have the power to influence what happens in your garden. You can cut back, tidy, stake, even replant and change things around. Come December, there is no choice other than to recognise that it's nature who is really in charge. Submit to her will and enjoy the way she works, which is clearly visible now, stripped of distractions.

December is uncompromising. There may be frost, fog, even snow; then days when the whole garden seems becalmed, when the warmth of the sun and the blue of the sky lull you into thinking it will always be like this. Such days offer opportunities to plant the bare-rooted trees and shrubs that are skulking in the shed. When our eldest daughter Annie was a baby, more than 30 years ago, I planted my first consignment of bare-rooted old roses in December on fine days while she obligingly slept in her pram out in the fresh air. When the package was opened several days before, I felt like Jack of beanstalk fame, my sensible alter-ego saying to my predominant daftly optimistic side: "What! You spent all that money on these few thorny twigs? How could you." The soil was warm and friable. In they went their roots, ▷

"Come December, there is no choice other than to recognise that it's nature who is really in charge"

> *“gardening is not a question of right and wrong... Eventually you come to realise that however unpredictable Mother Nature may seem, in fact she is the only thing on which you can depend”*

▷ spread gently, the joints of their grafts peeping out above the earth, firmed and watered but barely visible. A year and a half later, when Annie's sister Alice was born, the bare twigs had developed into bushes full of fragrant blooms and lush foliage. There was *Rosa* 'Céleste' with classic buds and perfect pale pink flowers set against glaucous foliage, *Rosa* 'Charles de Mills', with luscious, velvety crimson petals and intoxicating scent, and many more.

Gardening for me then was a new arena, packed with experiment and blind leaps of faith. It's one thing to read a book about how to garden and which plants to choose – I'd read every word Graham Stuart Thomas had published about old roses and spent long hours poring over catalogues, making and remaking lists – but another to do it for real. Yet the more you do, the more reassured you become that gardening is not a question of right and wrong, nor one of control and winning. It is neither a competition nor a fight. Eventually you come to realise that however unpredictable Mother Nature may seem, in fact she is the only thing on which you can depend. You learn to trust her, to find out about her laws and to co-operate with them. In some ways gardening is an artificial process, the imposition of the gardener's will on their plot, but always it is a compromise; to achieve your design, to put your ideas into practice, you must always consult the muse of Mother Earth.

Once you come to realise how privileged you are to be working with nature, to grow, nurture and enjoy, there is no looking back. The magic builds, the allure becomes more gripping.

Soon after we came here, we planted a small *Magnolia stellata*. Now it is a beautiful spreading tree with great presence. The other day a gardening commentator suggested this magnolia was not very special – I beg to differ. Its shape is intricate, its stems bare now, evidence of its age – they are a record of every season and every year through which it has existed. Its grey bark is hardly discernible under a shaggy coat of lichen, a mixture of subtle colours and intriguing texture. And now its swelling flower buds are covered in the softest fur as though they had absorbed the mistiness of the December day.□

• This month's column concludes Carol Klein's *A Year at Glebe Cottage*.

Next month Lia Leendertz begins a new series, *My Gardening Year*.

Things to do this month

Tulips

The last of the tulips always go into pots in December. The bulbs have been kept dry and ventilated and are solid and firm. The compost is our usual potting mix with added sterilised loam and masses of grit. We plant the bulbs well down in the pots, with a hand's depth of soil over them. Each pot is finished with more grit and the pots are stood in the open. Tulips need a period of prolonged cold to flower well.

Planning

This is a good time to plan, whether that's introducing new features and new plantings, refining existing planting schemes or ordering seed for new excitements. Rather than impulse-buying, I'm trying to choose specific cultivars for definite areas. I've saved seed from *Cosmos* 'Candy Stripe' plants grown from seed given away free with GARDENS ILLUSTRATED last April; next year I want to try it with a dark-leaved coleus or *Ricinus*.

To look out for

Holly and ivy

For wildlife these are two of the most important plants in our hedgerows and gardens. Only when ivy starts to climb and develop a woody trunk does it begin to flower. While it is creeping around on the ground there are no flowers, although it does make cover for insects and small mammals. Its flower heads are a masterpiece in symmetry and are loaded with nectar, a vital source of food for late butterflies and other pollinating insects. By now it is covered with black berries and these are crucial for hungry birds, which feast on them with relish. They mature over a long time, so the larder provides food for months. Simultaneously holly provides bright berries to eat and the sight of these against their dark, glossy leaves is a winter treat.

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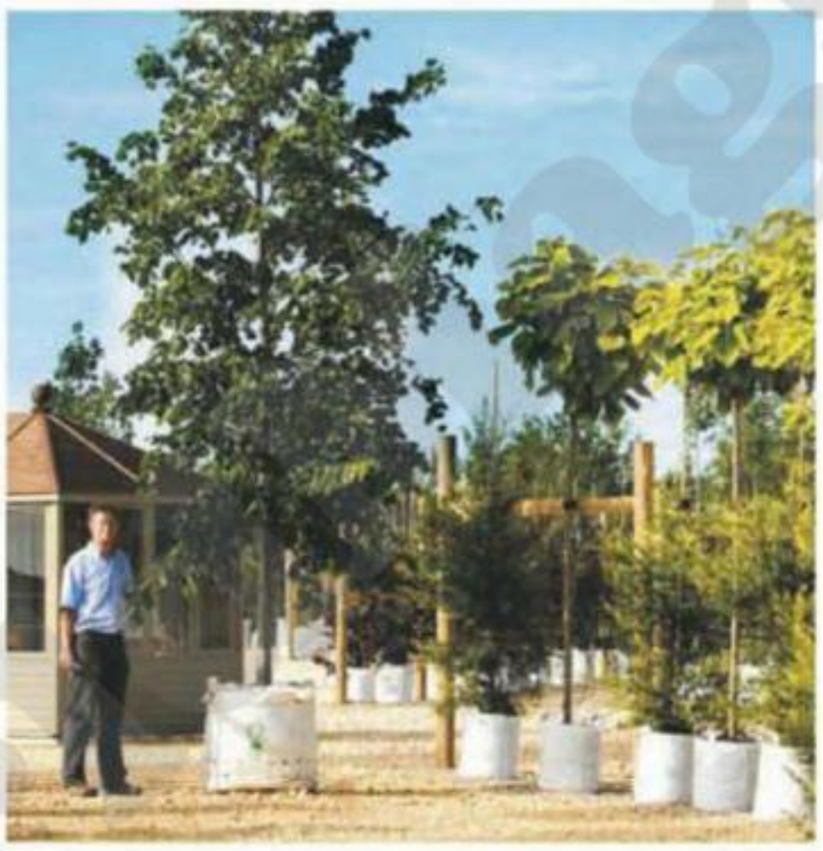

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ABOVE LEFT Hand-painted ceramic gnomes, £9.99 each, Rockett St George. MIDDLE Pure recycled wool picnic blankets, £20 each, Hen & Hammock. RIGHT Cast iron stag boot scraper, £19, Dibor.

ABOVE LEFT Handmade birch plywood reindeer, £13, Nordic Design Forum. MIDDLE Porcelain Christmas tree tea light, £14.95, Dee Puddy. RIGHT Flora & Fauna rubber stamp set, £19.99, The Oak Room.

ABOVE LEFT Liquorice and scarlet mini 'hottie' hand-warmer, £16.99, Jane Beck Welsh Blankets. MIDDLE Large (1.5 litre) stainless steel watering can, £20, The Balcony Gardener. RIGHT Set of three aged terracotta pots in a wire holder with hooks on one side to secure to your window ledge, £15.95, Cape Henley.

Gifts for gardeners

From stocking fillers to luxurious treats, our pick of Christmas presents for green-fingered folk

PHOTOGRAPHS SEAN MALYON STYLING AMY GRENHAM

Classic wooden handle secateurs with safety lock, £12.95, The Balcony Gardener. ▷

• For details of all stockists turn to page 99.

Price range: £20 - £50

Children's garden tools (L-R) – snow shovel £17.50, rake £11.35, shovel £12.95, or all three for £37.50, Sneeboer.

ABOVE LEFT Handmade sheepskin slipper 'bootees' in 'whiskey' colour, £49, Celtic Sheepskin.
MIDDLE Recycled cardboard snowflake wreath, £34, Whippet Grey. RIGHT Cashmere fingerless gloves in 'truffle with cedar', £49, Brora.

ABOVE LEFT Potting shed kit, £30, John Lewis. MIDDLE Tatty Devine English oak necklace with metal alloy chain, £27, Yorkshire Sculpture Park.
RIGHT Thick hand-knitted lambswool socks with cable and rib detailing in 'Mustard', £29, Toast; Lambswool socks in saffron stripe and snowflake, £24 each, Plümo.

ABOVE LEFT Large metal outdoor clock in fully weatherproofed, clay-coloured surround, £45, Willow & Stone. MIDDLE Talk to the animals using this cuckoo bird call, £22.99, Crocus. RIGHT Hand-turned oak or walnut twine caddies, with a spool of jute, £26 each, West's of East Dean.

• For details of all stockists turn to page 99.

Price range: over £50

ABOVE LEFT Generously sized, printed, soft wool 'Aleila' scarf with frayed edges, £79, Toast. MIDDLE Large green glass hand-blown jewel vase in a beautifully uneven finish (height 32cm), £98, Plümo. RIGHT This robust outdoor 'fire pit' can also double up as a log store, £85, A Country Room.

ABOVE LEFT Steiff Classic 1935-style Airedale terrier made from mohair with leather collar, £134.95, Whippet Grey (without flower). MIDDLE Hand-embroidered linen apron, €85, Kila Siku. Proceeds go to charity. RIGHT Three-quarter standard olive tree and Pienza pot, £84.98 for both, from Crocus.

ABOVE LEFT Metal garden chairs in a choice of six bold colours, £129, Rockett St George. MIDDLE The Westerley, fully waterproof leather boot for ladies, £285, Hunter; pictured here on weatherproof cast iron doormat, £62, Dibor. RIGHT Handmade chestnut & walnut 'Sussex' trug, £95, West's of East Dean.

This leather gardening bag has four pockets on each side for all your gardening essentials. With handles and shoulder strap. £200, Petersham Nurseries.□

• For details of all stockists turn to page 99.

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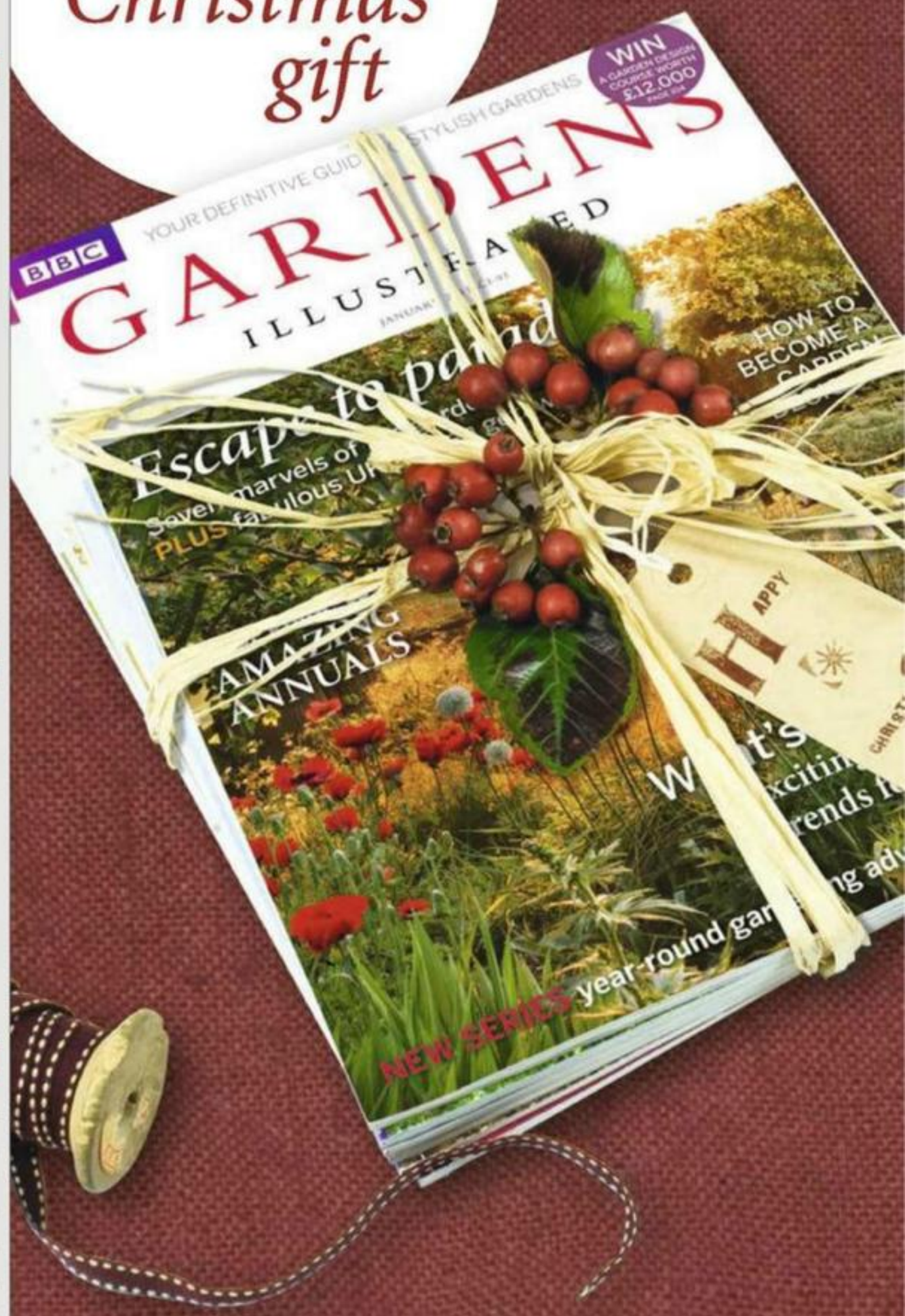

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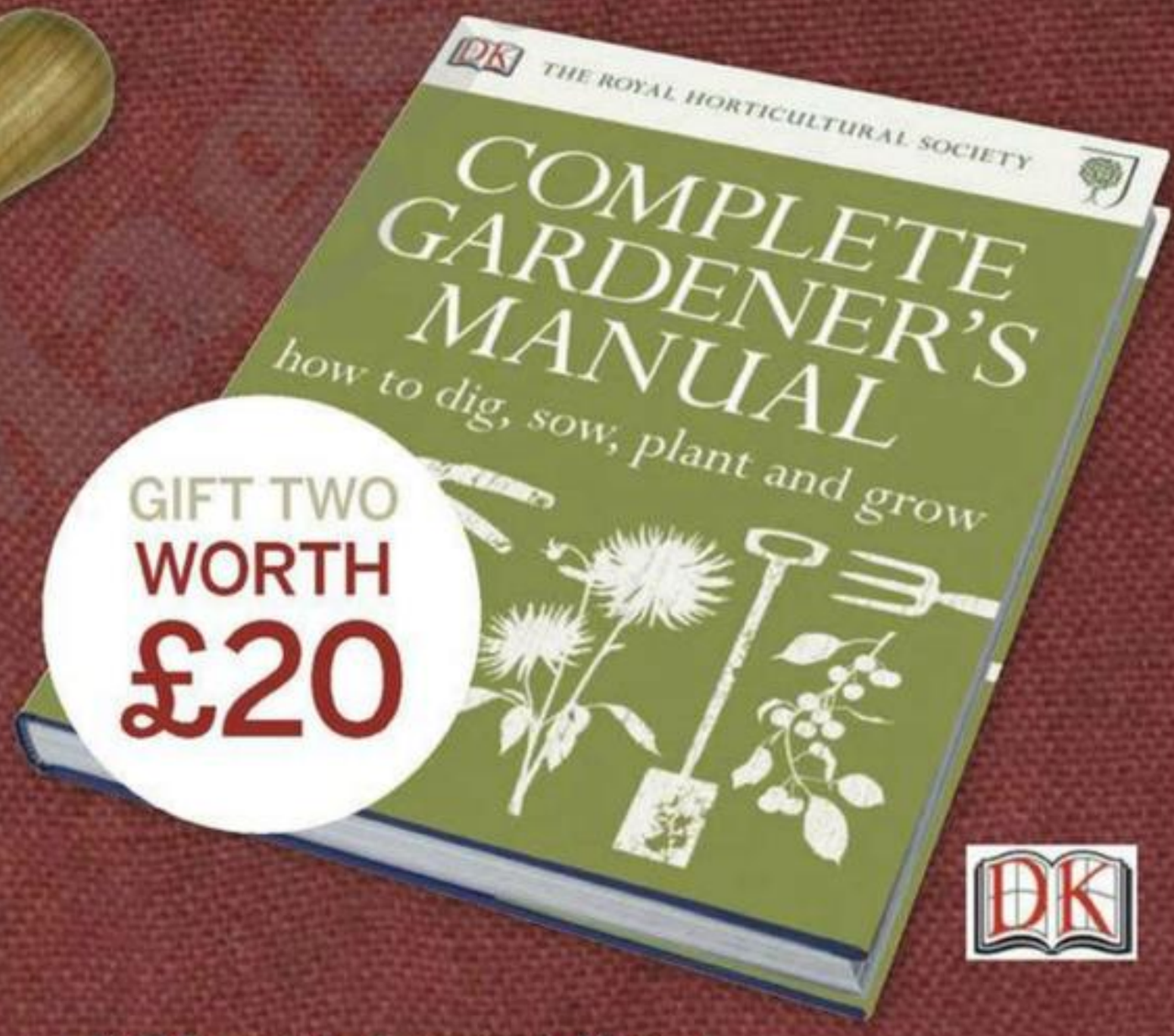

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In brief

NAME Somerset Lodge.
WHAT Privately owned formal garden and meadow.
WHERE Nunney, Somerset.
SIZE 2.5 acres.
SOIL Heavy clay.
CONDITIONS Frosty and windy.
SPECIAL FEATURES Structural planting that looks outstanding in winter for its clipped evergreen topiary and hedges.

Clipped box plants cluster around a frozen water feature made from an old cider press.

BELOW **Blocks of *Rosa rugosa* planted in the meadow bear bright red fruits well into winter.**

A pair of frosted sea buckthorns flank The Theatre, a timber and clipped yew structure fronted by an audience of clipped box topiary in various shapes.

A study in ice

Frosty weather adds sparkle to a formal garden of plants clipped into crisp lines and voluptuous shapes

WORDS **MATTHEW WILSON** PHOTOGRAPHS **LYNN KEDDIE**

When Alan and Karên Watson acquired their home in the village of Nunney, Somerset, in 1990, they also took on a genuine blank canvas of a garden. Featuring just one aged and lonesome apple tree, the garden ran to less than a quarter of an acre and adjoined a farmyard with a large and rather aromatic slurry pit.

Karên – now Lady Watson, following her husband's elevation to the peerage in 1995 – spent a decade restoring the house, a Gothic-windowed property she describes as resembling "a church at the front and a dacha at the rear". Then thoughts turned to the garden, which had now extended to 2.5 acres with the acquisition of the farmyard and attendant slurry.

Lady Watson had had little exposure to gardening, a fact she cheerfully acknowledges. "I only knew the names of five plants." But armed with that limited palette she set about planning the garden, having discounted a concept from a professional designer as "there was no room for dogs in it."

Less is more

Early influences came from several sources. Garden designer Russell Page's mantra of 'use fewer plants, well' impressed Lady Watson, and Nicole de Vésian's garden in Provence (see issue 178) seemed to bear out Page's advice. The magical 'gardens in a ruin' at Ninfa in Italy, provided further inspiration. The ancient castle in the village and the quirky gothic of the lodge itself lent an air of the romantic and unusual to the built landscape. Finally, hands-on advice came from garden historian Chris Bull, who encouraged the use of strong vistas to link the garden with the rising ground of the adjoining meadow, into which the whole now flows.

Bold use of hedging and topiary gives Somerset Lodge a strong presence in winter. Next to the house a rectangular planting of low box hedges mimics the dimensions of the house. In part of this box frame the old apple tree still stands. Three large yew pyramids stand sentinel, surrounded by large clumps of lavender that in clipped winter mode take on the same structural quality as topiary. The Watsons refer to the nearby row of clipped, conical yews (pictured opposite, below left) as the Daleks, in part due to the enjoyment they bring to children who visit the garden and love to chicane between them, including their own grandchildren.

A theatrical scene

The yews frame the view to an area referred to as The Theatre (pictured on page 32-33), a slope surmounted by a timber-and-trellis pergola overlooking a group of clipped box plants. The pergola is framed by a pair of standard sea buckthorns (*Hippophae rhamnoides*), which the owners call their "Somerset olive trees".

Throughout the garden, plants have been selected for toughness as much as beauty. Among them are subjects rescued from dark nooks and crannies of nurseries and restored to health in situ. "It's a Battersea Dogs' Home for plants," jokes Lady Watson. She likens her garden to Bach's *Goldberg Variations*; the same tune played in different ways. But equally applicable is the Martin Luther motto on a garden bench, which she translates from the German; 'Even if I knew that the world would end tomorrow, I would plant an apple tree today.' □

• The garden at Somerset Lodge is due to open under the National Gardens Scheme on 29 April and 8 July 2012. See www.ngs.org.uk for details.

Design solutions

At Somerset Lodge hedges, topiary, furniture and planting are cleverly arranged to make a space that looks beautiful all year

1 **SCREENING** The Theatre, an architectural structure made of trellis and clipped yew, partly conceals a high stone wall that would otherwise dominate the garden (see also pages 32-33).

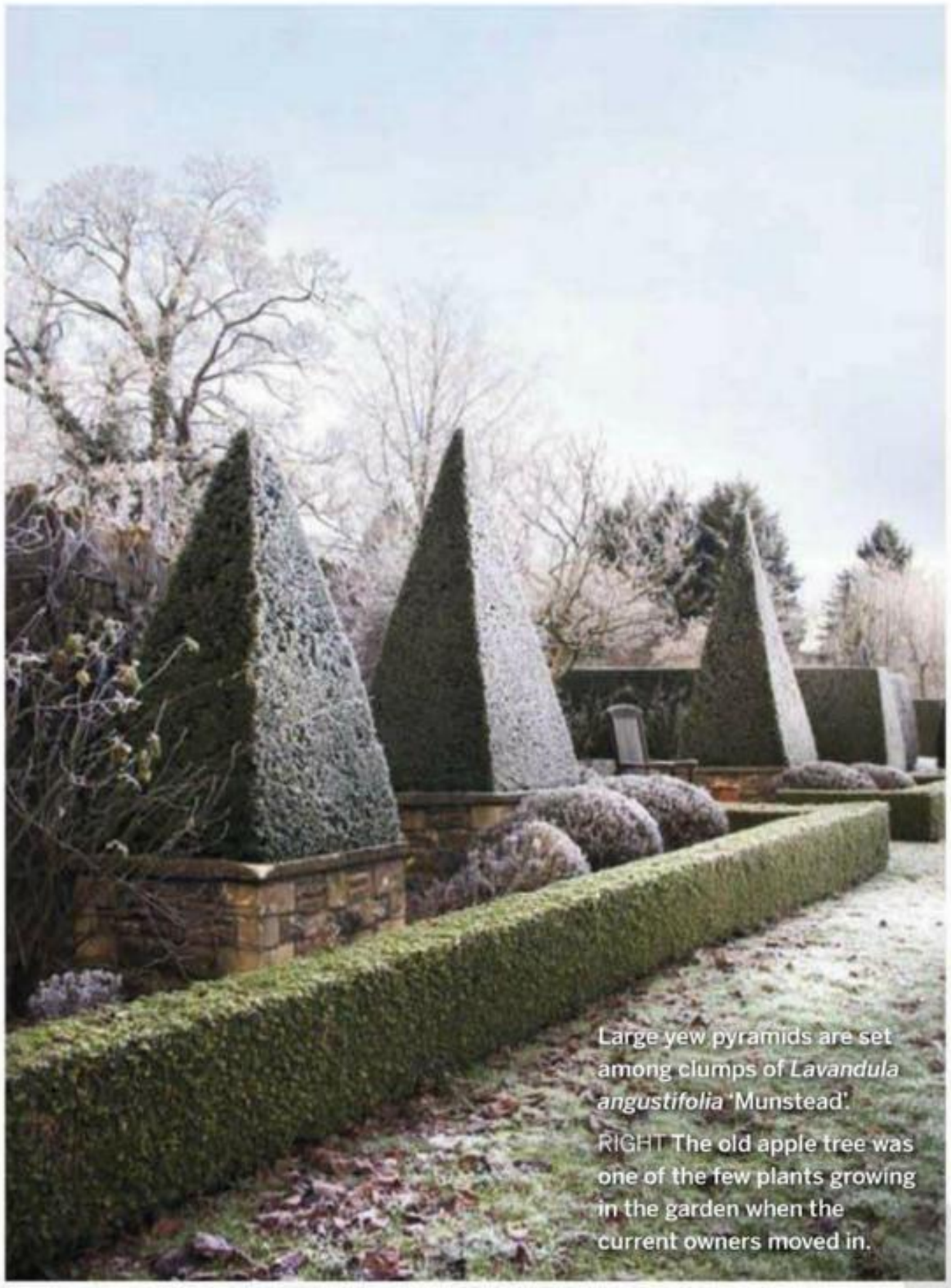
2 **KEY POSITIONS** A large *Hydrangea aspera* Villosa Group draws the eye to this shady corner in summer, and even in its dormant winter state its long stems and delicate seedheads look interesting until they are cut back in February.

3 **HEIGHT** A small sea buckthorn tree (*Hippophae rhamnoides*) brings some essential height to the composition, casting dappled shade in summer and bearing orange fruit in winter.

4 **STRUCTURAL PLANTING** Like a well-cut suit, a crisp yew hedge provides a dark backdrop accessorised with more glamorous elements in front of it.

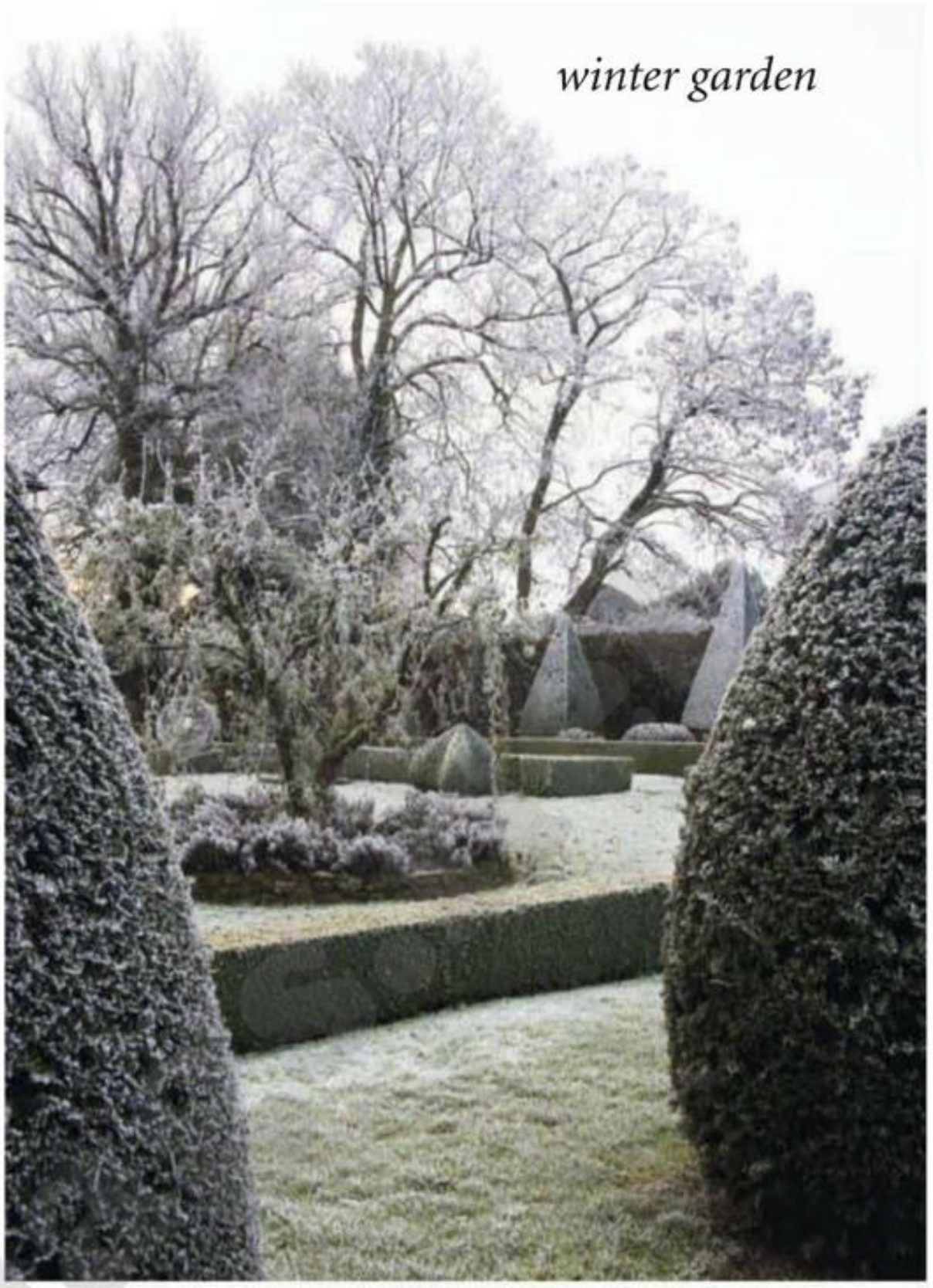
5 **VISUAL LINKS** A 'slipper' of clipped evergreen *Lonicera nitida* anchors the tree, neatens its base and links the corner-planting to the other clipped plants in the middle of the garden.

6 **BOLD FORMS** This stone bench is a sturdy enough shape to hold its own among the strong shapes around it – and, of course, it makes a satisfying place to while away some time before exploring the rest of the garden.



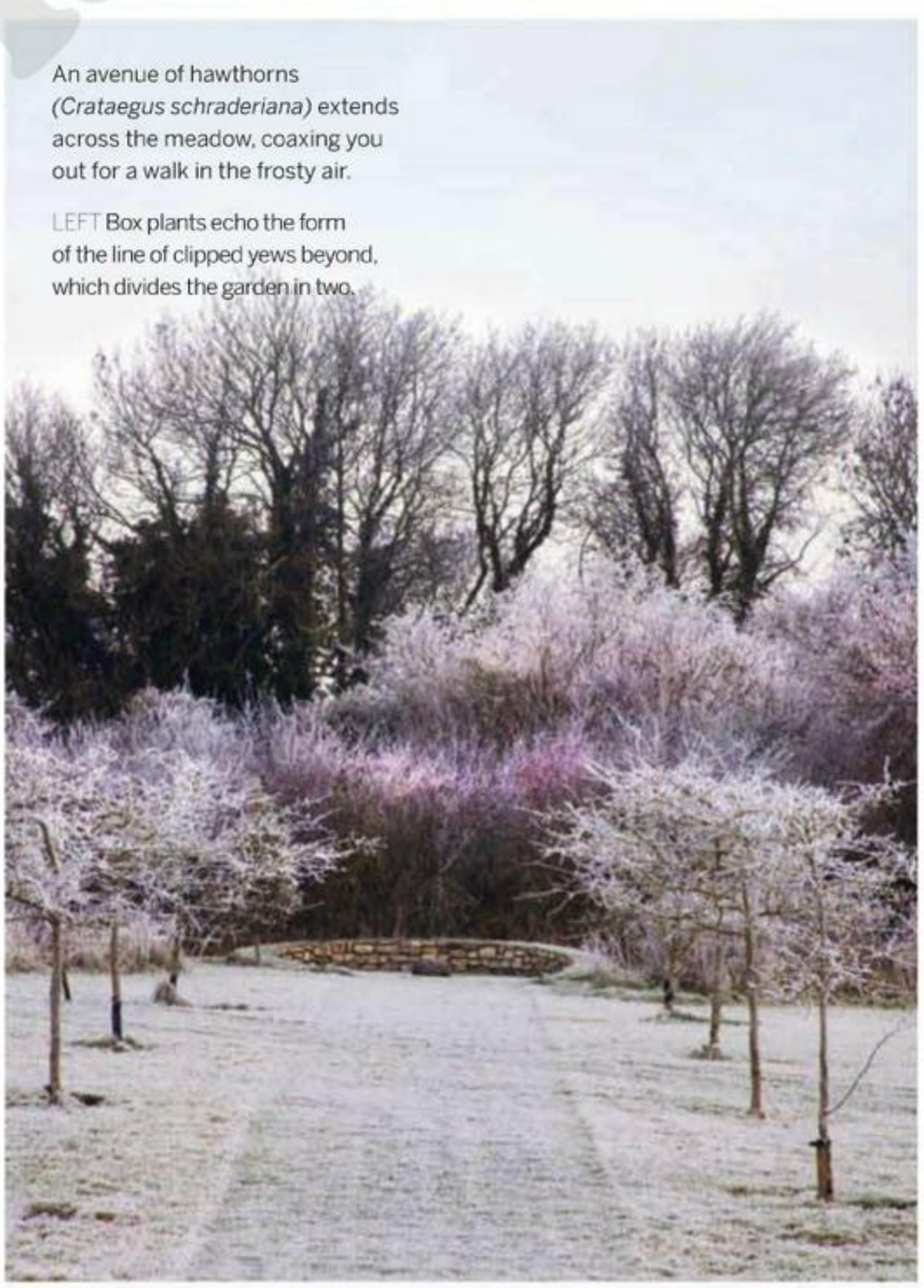
Large yew pyramids are set among clumps of *Lavandula angustifolia* 'Munstead'.

RIGHT The old apple tree was one of the few plants growing in the garden when the current owners moved in.



An avenue of hawthorns *(Crataegus schraderiana)* extends across the meadow, coaxing you out for a walk in the frosty air.

LEFT Box plants echo the form of the line of clipped yews beyond, which divides the garden in two.



***Helleborus x hybridus* 'Queen of the Night'**
An old strain first developed by Elizabeth Strangman at Washfield Nursery and improved over the years. More than half of the prodigies have purple new foliage and rounded flower shapes with a bloom to the deep purple colour.

Christmas roses

With strong colours and exquisite forms, hellebores give winter gardens a sparkle all their own

WORDS NIGEL ROWLAND

Nigel Rowland is owner of Long Acre Plants in Somerset

Hellebores are the great staple of the winter garden, flowering in a wealth of colours in the opening three months of the year. Twenty years or so ago, hellebore-lovers would make a pilgrimage to specialist growers such as Blackthorn Nursery in Hampshire or Washfield Nursery in Kent to see and buy the latest forms in early March. Nowadays, in most winters, most hellebores begin to flower in late January and continue until late March. A combination of breeding for early flowers and (until the last two winters) relatively mild weather has led to this wonderful extended flowering period.

Most hellebore species are naturally woodland plants from Europe, the near East and in one case, China. Others, particularly the stem-forming species (*lividus*, *argutifolius*, *vesicarius* and *foetidus*) come from dry slopes and open, sunny spots. *Helleborus niger* grows mostly on sub-alpine meadows.

Hellebores have been productive for plant breeders. Through careful selection of the best new seedlings, flowers and foliage can be improved year on year. Hellebores are now available in a range of pure colours and single, double and anemone flowers that were rare in years gone by. The Harvington strains of *Helleborus* x *hybridus* have glossy, robust and disease-resistant foliage as well as good, clear flower colour and form (see issue 156).

A huge range of flower colour is now available among selections of *Helleborus* x *hybridus*, from green to white, pink, purple, near-black and almost-blue. The length of flowering period, allied to the fabulous foliage of some forms, cannot be matched by any other winter/spring flowering genus.

While most of the *H.* x *hybridus* forms are still seed-raised from careful hand-pollination of selected parents, developments in propagation knowledge have led to hybrids such as *H.* x *ericsmithii* and *H.* x *nigercors* being clonally produced by tissue culture and hence becoming increasingly available. A raft of new forms will come out over the next few years, some of which promise to be exciting.

I like the single flowers best. The doubles are popular and garden worthy and just as vigorous as the singles, but large, bowl-shaped single selections of *H.* x *hybridus* with bright clear yellow, pure white or bright red flowers are really hard to beat. The flashes and spotting to be found in the speckled, white, yellow, green and pink forms are also attractive.
I much prefer the pure single white *Helleborus* x *hybridus* to *Helleborus niger* in the garden; it is larger-growing, more disease-resistant, more prolific and easier to cultivate. Some of the newer named *Helleborus* x *ericsmithii* (*H. niger* x *sternii*) forms are superb, particularly 'Winter Moonbeam' and 'Pirouette' (both on page 39).

Planting companions

One can use hellebores as part of a mixed herbaceous planting in the garden or with shrubs. The ideal situation, though, is to use them in areas of the garden planted for spring, under deciduous trees with an herbaceous border in front. They go beautifully with snowdrops and spring bulbs, rhizomes, corms and tubers such as *Eranthis*, *Leucojum vernum*, *Chionodoxa*, *Scilla*, *Arum italicum* var. *pictum*, *Anemone nemorosa*, *Erythronium*, *Cyclamen coum* and *Crocus tommasinianus*. Hellebores, particularly *H.* x *hybridus*, also work well with other woodland perennials such as *Primula elatior* and *P. vulgaris* cultivars as well as ferns, *Pulmonaria*, *Lamium orvala*, *Hacquetia epipactis*, European epimediums and their hybrids, *Lathyrus vernus*, *Cardamine*, larger *Hepatica* and *Euphorbia amygdaloides* var. *robbiae*. *Helleborus argutifolius*, *H. lividus* and – better than either of these – the hybrid *H.* x *sternii* like a well-drained spot and more sun. *H. foetidus* does well in dry soils; we have a patch that thrives under a large holly where little else grows.

• Turn the page for Nigel Rowland's choice of 12 sensational hellebores.

Hellebores: 12 Christmas roses

Nigel Rowland chooses some of his favourite plants for the winter garden

BEST FOR WINTER FOLIAGE (1-2)

1 ***Helleborus* x *sternii* Blackthorn Group**

A strain raised by Robin and Sue White at the now closed Blackthorn Nursery. It's a compact selection with good disease-resistance. Pearly silver-pink flowers emerge over well-marked, serrated leaves. Height (H) 30cm. AGM.*

2 ***H.* x *hybridus* Harvington double chocolate**

A recent new strain from breeder Hugh Nunn of Harvington Hellebores, with gorgeous, richly coloured flowers. H 60cm.

BEST DOUBLE FLOWERS

3 ***H.* double spotted**

A strain that's proving very popular. In some, the spotting merges to form blotches. H 30-45cm.

BEST SINGLE FLOWERS (4-6)

4 ***H.* x *hybridus* 'Emerald Queen'**

A strain originally from world-famous hellebore-breeder Elizabeth Strangman, this has shiny, deliciously bright green flowers with red spotting or blotches. Very popular. H 30-45cm.

5 ***H. x hybridus* Harvington yellow**

Hugh Nunn has just about the clearest yellow strain. Gone are the days of pale primrose; the new colours are a deep bright yellow. H 30cm.

6 ***H.* x *ericsmithii* 'Winter Sunshine'**

A clone with deep steel-grey foliage on a relatively compact form. Good white flowers age to a mid-pink. A selection by Roger Harvey of Harveys Garden Plants in Suffolk. H 40cm.

BEST NEW INTRODUCTIONS (7-8)

7 ***H.* x *hybridus* Party Dress Group**

Like other picotee hellebores, both single and double, this is edged and streaked with colour. H 30-45cm.

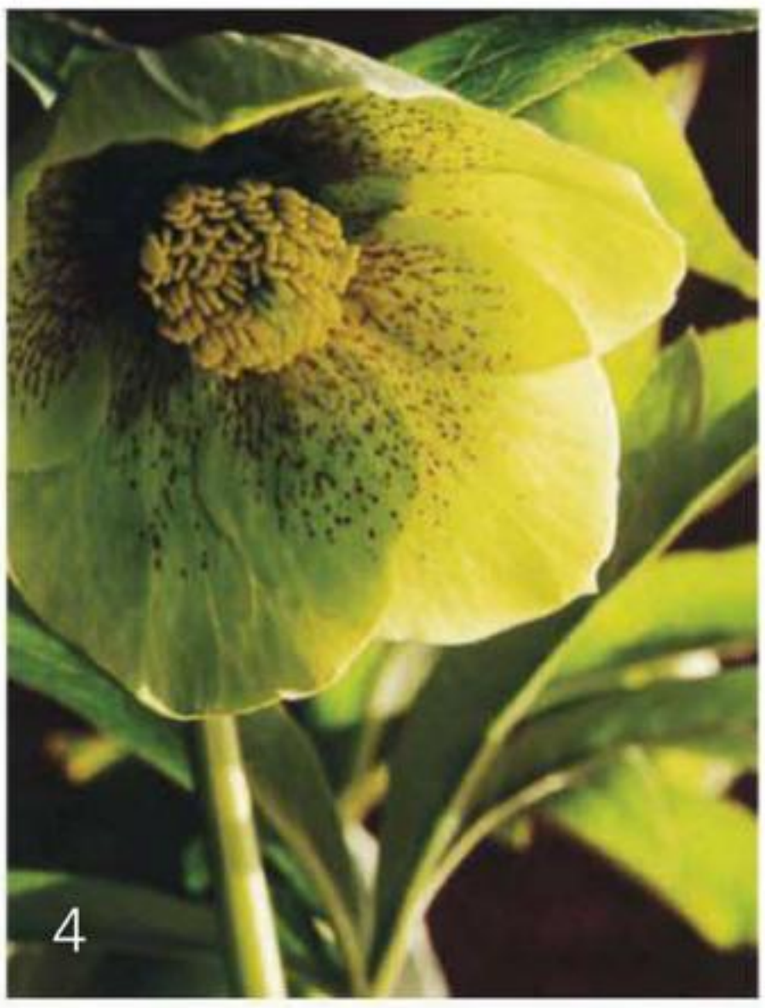
8 ***H.* x *hybridus* Harvington yellow double spotted**

This strain has rich yellow flowers with dark red spots and blotches. H 30-45cm.

BEST FOR GROWING IN SUN

9 ***H.* 'Pirouette'**

A tall-growing clone with steel-grey leaves and white flowers that emerge in December



1 JULIE DANSEREAU / GAP PHOTOS; 2 CLIVE NICHOLS; 3 HOWARD RICE / GAP PHOTOS; 4 FLOWERPHOTOS/SALLY REED / GARDEN WORLD IMAGES; 5 CLIVE NICHOLS; 6 JOHN GLOVER / ALAMY

*HOLDS AN AWARD OF GARDEN MERIT FROM THE ROYAL HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY.

7

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7 ELKE BORKOWSKI / GAP PHOTOS; 8 CLIVE NICHOLS; 9 FHF GREENMEDIA / GAP PHOTOS; 10 CLIVE NICHOLS; 11 HOWARD RICE / GAP PHOTOS; 12 JOHN GLOVER / ALAMY

and quickly change to a bright mid-red/pink. This cultivar was raised by Robin White of Blackthorn Nursery. H up to 60cm.

BEST FOR VIGOUR (10-11)

10 ***H.* x *hybridus* Harvington double red**

The red-flowered forms, both single and double, are excellent in the garden. Disease-resistant and usually the most vigorous of all, with good-sized flowers and healthy foliage. H 30-45cm.

11 ***H.* x *hybridus* Harvington yellow speckled**

This strain has rich yellow flowers with dark red spots and blotches. H 30-45cm.

BEST FOR ALL-YEAR-ROUND FOLIAGE

12 ***H. x ericsmithii* 'Winter Moonbeam'**

A clone whose grey foliage is mottled white. Looks good all year round. Bears white flowers that fade to greenish pink. H 45cm. □

PESTS AND DISEASES

Most common hellebores are on the whole easy to grow. They tend to thrive, flower reliably and don't need to be replaced. However, various **fungal diseases** can afflict them, black spot being the most common. Remove and burn affected foliage. If the problem persists, spray with a wide-ranging fungicide. *H. niger*, in particular, needs spraying a couple of times a year in order to thrive in most gardens. **Aphids** love hellebores; squash small infestations or use a soap-based spray – a chemical insecticide is rarely needed in a garden situation. **Vine weevil** can be a problem, particularly the grubs eating the roots, but this is rarely fatal.

RECOMMENDED SUPPLIERS

- Ashwood Nurseries, Ashwood, Kingswinford, West Midlands DY6 0AE. Tel 01384 401996, www.ashwoodnurseries.com
- Farmyard Nurseries, Llandysul, Carmarthenshire SA44 4RL. Tel 01559 363389, www.farmyardnurseries.co.uk
- Harveys Garden Plants, Great Green, Thurston, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk IP31 3SJ. Tel 01359 233363, www. harveysgardenplants.co.uk
- Long Acre Plants, Charlton Musgrove, near Wincanton, Somerset BA9 8EX. Tel 01963 32802, www.plantsforshade.co.uk
- RHS Plant Centre – Wisley Gardens, Surrey GU23 6QB. Tel 01483 211113, www.rhs.org.uk
- Woottens of Wenhaston, Halesworth, Suffolk IP19 9HD. Tel 01502 478258, www.woottensplants.co.uk □

Hazelnut biscuits

Shelling hazelnuts is not a fast job, so you will need to set a little time aside in advance to grapple with your hoard. Use star-shaped cutters and hang these biscuits from the tree, or package them up as nutty gifts.

Ingredients

125g butter
150g golden caster sugar
150g plain flour
75g shelled hazelnuts
1 egg yolk

Method

In a large bowl, cream the butter and the sugar together until pale and fluffy. Blitz the hazelnuts to a fine powder in a food processor and add to the bowl, together with the rest of the ingredients. Use a little water to bring the mixture together. Knead lightly, form into a ball, wrap and refrigerate for at least an hour. Pre-heat the oven to 180°C (gas mark 4). Roll out half the mixture at a time, keeping the other half refrigerated. On a lightly floured surface, roll out to 5mm thick, cut out shapes and transfer them to a baking sheet lined with baking parchment. Bake for about 15 minutes, until light brown. Cool on a wire rack.

Celebration food

Wholesome party delicacies made with fresh produce from the garden and foraged fruit and nuts

RECIPES **LIA LEENDERTZ** PHOTOGRAPHS **JASON INGRAM** STYLING **CLARE GARDNER-MEDWIN**

Confiture of shallots

This recipe by Oded Schwartz is about the most luxurious thing you can do with a shallot. The flavour improves over time, so ideally leave it for at least a year. Serve with cheese or cold meats.

Ingredients

1.5kg shallots
200g salt
Water to cover
4 cardamom pods
2 cinnamon sticks
3 strips of lemon zest
2 small dried bird's eye chillies
2 litres white vinegar
1kg preserving or granulated sugar
15g whole cloves
15g caraway seeds
15g ground chilli

Method

Peel shallots, keeping the root end whole. Dissolve salt in enough water to cover the shallots, and pour over, weighing them down with a plate. Leave for 24 hours. Tie lemon zest, cardamom, cinnamon and chillies in a square of muslin. Put vinegar and sugar in a large saucepan. Add the spice bag and bring to the boil, stirring to dissolve sugar. Boil for 10 minutes and skim. Add remaining spices. Drain shallots and add to the boiling syrup. Reduce heat and simmer gently for 15 minutes. Take off heat, cool, cover and leave overnight. Next day, bring slowly to the boil and simmer gently for 15 minutes. Cool and leave overnight as before. On the third day, bring slowly to the boil again and simmer gently, until shallots turn a clear golden brown. Bottle in hot, sterilised jars and seal while hot. Store in a cool, dark place.

With thanks to Arabella Sock

Beetroot crisps with dips

These delicious crisps look particularly good if you grow different coloured beetroots such as yellow 'Burpees Golden' and red-ringed 'Chioggia'. Home-grown carrots and borlotti beans* can be made into great dips.

Beetroot crisps

Take one or two each of several differently coloured beetroots. Peel and slice with a mandolin and drop, up to ten at a time, into hot oil. Wait until the slices stop bubbling entirely – this is the moisture being driven out of them – and then cook for a minute more. Lift out and drain on kitchen paper. Deep-fry a sprig of rosemary, then crumble the leaves on to the crisps, along with some coarse sea salt.

Carrot and sumac dip

Toss 500g of carrots and five unpeeled cloves of garlic in a mixture of one dessert spoon of olive oil, one dessert spoon of runny honey, a teaspoon of cumin seeds and two teaspoons of ground sumac. Roast in a medium oven (180°C, gas mark 4) until soft, with edges starting to caramelise. Blend in a liquidiser or with a hand-held blender, adding two tablespoons of tahini, a good sprinkling of salt, the juice of half a lemon and a little more olive oil. Serve warm or at room temperature, with a little ground sumac sprinkled on top.

*The other dip pictured here is a delicious blend of borlotti beans and goat's cheese – see www.gardensillustrated.com for recipe.

Damson pastelitos

These pretty little pastries are made throughout South America, traditionally with *membrillo* (quince cheese). You can make them with any fruit cheese – a thicker, harder set jam – and here I've used damson (available from delicatessens, or for recipe see www.gardensillustrated.com). I have made the pastelitos the traditional way, drenched in syrup after cooking, but I like them also dusted in a mixture of cinnamon and icing sugar, which forms a slight crust (pictured here) if done while still hot.

Ingredients

One packet pre-rolled puff pastry
Sunflower oil for deep frying
Icing sugar
Cinnamon
Damson cheese

Method

Roll out the pre-rolled pastry a little further so that it is fine but not unworkably delicate. Cut into 4-5cm squares and put a teaspoon of damson cheese at the centre of half of the squares. Wet the edges and then place a square of pastry over the top, offset to form an-eight-pointed star shape. Pinch in around the fruit cheese to make the shapes as defined as possible, otherwise the definition will be lost when the pastry puffs up. Chill in the fridge for half an hour. Heat a pan full of oil until a bread crumb dropped in starts bubbling straight away, then carefully lower the pastries in, pretty side down, three at a time. Fry for a couple of minutes, until golden brown, then flip and fry on the other side. Remove from the fat, drain on kitchen roll and sieve a mixture of cinnamon and icing sugar over them.

Mulled sloe champagne cocktails

A slug of this syrup at the bottom of a glass of champagne makes a great winter cocktail: fruity, spicy and sparkling with a mulberry glow, and redolent of bountiful hedgerows.

Ingredients

2kg sloes, washed
750ml water
1 egg white
80g sugar per 100ml liquid
Spices: 2 cinnamon sticks, 10 allspice berries, 4 cloves, slices of orange and lemon zest, tied in a small piece of muslin
Champagne to serve

Method

Place the sloes, water and the bag of spices into a large saucepan and bring to the boil. Simmer for about 15 minutes. Remove the spice bag and put it into a clean saucepan. Place a large piece of clean muslin in the saucepan, then pour in the cooked sloes. Tie the muslin at the corners and hang it up to drip into the pan overnight. In the morning, squeeze the cloth gently and then set aside. Remove the spice bag from the liquid. Beat the egg white, then whisk into the liquid. Bring all to the boil, stirring frequently and skimming off the froth on the surface. Cool, measure volume, then add 80g sugar per 100ml liquid. Boil until it starts to thicken and sugar is completely dissolved, cool slightly. Then pour into warm, sterile bottles and seal. To make up the cocktails, pour a dash of syrup into a glass and add Champagne.

Cheese and thyme straws

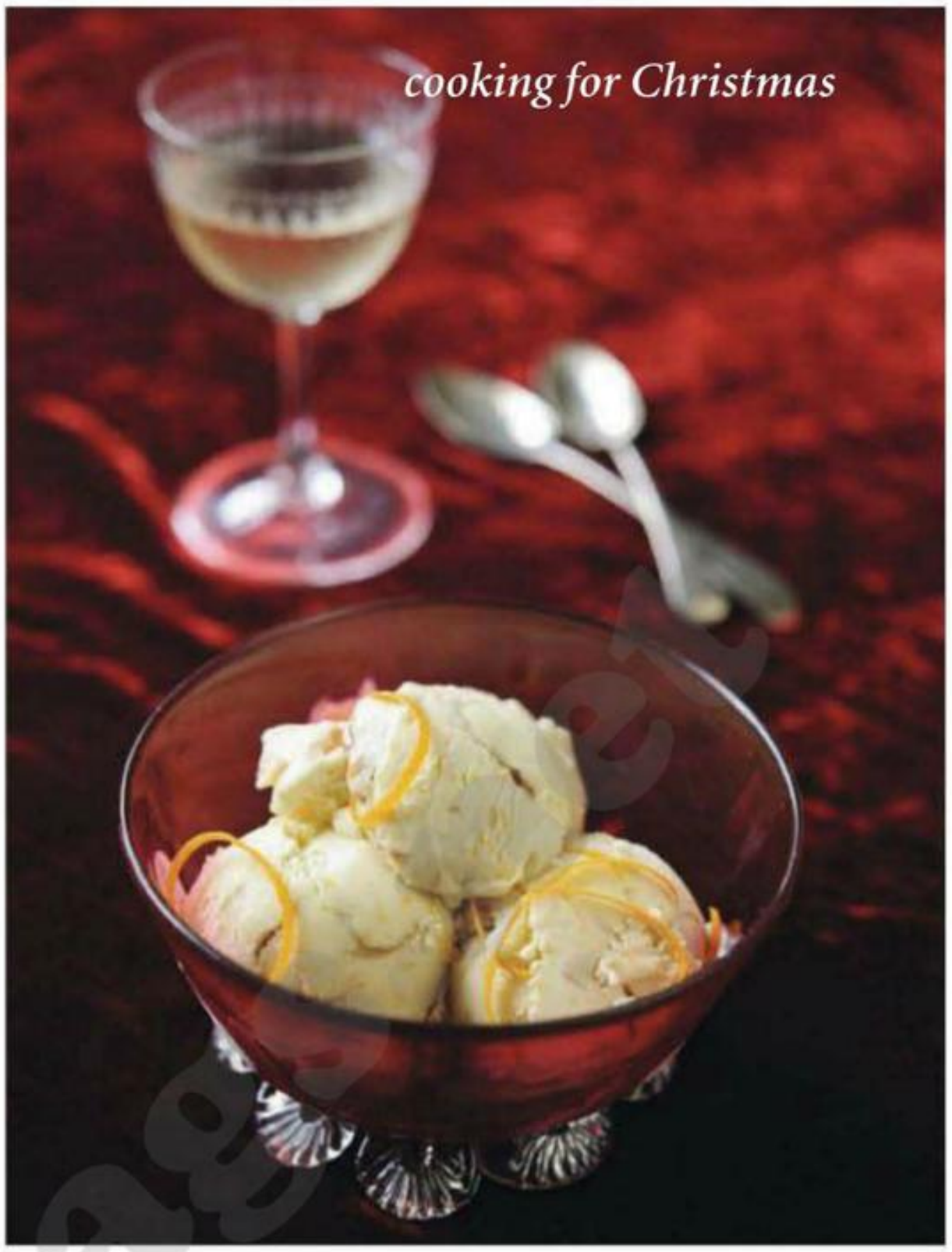
These utterly addictive cheese straws can be made with whatever herbs are still going strong in your garden. Thyme, sage and parsley are the obvious choices.

Ingredients

120g butter, softened
400g strong, grated cheddar cheese
50g grated parmesan
150g plain flour
100g spelt flour
1 tsp salt
A generous handful of chopped thyme, sage or parsley

Method

Preheat the oven to 200°C* (gas mark 6) and line two baking trays with baking parchment. Cream the cheese and butter together, then sieve in the flour. Add the other ingredients and mix well. Roll out to about 2cm thick and slice into thin strips. Place on the baking trays and bake for about 15 minutes, or until golden brown.



Walnut and apple brandy frangipane tart

Instead of traditional almonds, use some foraged walnuts to make this tart's frangipane base.

Ingredients

PASTRY

140g plain flour
30g icing sugar
75g butter
1 egg yolk

FILLING AND TOPPING

175g softened butter
175g caster sugar
4 eggs
3 tbsp apple brandy
175g walnuts, ground to powder
150g shelled, halved walnuts

GLAZE

4 tbsp caster sugar
2 tbsp apple juice
2 tbsp apple brandy

SERVE WITH

Crème fraîche or mascarpone

Method

Sift flour and sugar together, then rub in butter until it resembles fine breadcrumbs. Mix in the yolk, form into a ball, wrap and refrigerate for an hour. Grease a 24cm loose-bottomed tart tin, roll out the pastry and line the tin with it, leaving the edges overlapping. Press into corners, prick the base several times with a fork, and refrigerate for half an hour. Bake in the centre of the oven at 180°C* (gas mark 4) for about 15 minutes, or until light brown. Mix all the frangipane ingredients together, in a bowl or in a blender, and spoon into the tart, smoothing the top. Decorate with the walnut halves, either a ring around the edge or – more decadently – covering the whole surface. Put the glaze ingredients into a small saucepan and bubble together for about five minutes, or until it turns thick and syrupy. Brush over the walnut-covered parts. Bake at 190°C* (gas mark 5) for about 15 minutes, or until a skewer pushed into the centre comes out clean. Once the tart has cooled slightly, brush the whole surface with the glaze.

*Conventional oven – for fan-assisted ovens reduce temperature by 20°C

Orange, cardamom and rosehip ripple ice cream

The rosehip syrup makes a coloured ripple through this pale orange, delicately spiced ice cream (see www.gardensillustrated.com for recipe). You will need an ice cream maker to follow this recipe.

Ingredients

500ml full fat milk
6 egg yolks
125g caster sugar
2 cardamom pods
Zest of four oranges
300g mascarpone
Rosehip syrup

Method

Warm the milk in a saucepan. Crush the cardamom pods with a pestle and mortar and remove the green husks of the pods, dropping the black seeds into the milk. Leave to infuse for half an hour, then strain out the seeds. Whisk the egg yolks and the sugar together in a large bowl, then gradually whisk in the milk. Add the orange zest, transfer to a clean saucepan and warm gently, stirring constantly, until thick. Leave to cool, then mix in the mascarpone and churn in an ice cream maker. Place a third of the ice cream in a container, then drizzle on some syrup, using a skewer to swirl it in slightly. Repeat with two more layers and freeze. □

For summer...

In brief

NAME Mount St John

WHAT Contemporary garden with traditional references.

WHERE North Yorkshire.

SIZE Four acres.

SOIL Fertile loam with added grit.

CONDITIONS Very open and exposed, high light levels, elevated and prone to severe winter weather.

SPECIAL FEATURES Long-season plants that look good in winter as well as summer.

In summer the garden is filled with colour, from crimson splashes of *Knautia macedonica* to tall flower spikes of *Eremurus stenocephalus*, purple spent flower heads of *Nepeta subsessilis* 'Washfield' and the yellows of *Coreopsis verticillata* 'Zagreb' and *Achillea filipendulina* 'Cloth of Gold'.

OPPOSITE In winter the planting becomes a tapestry of box balls and tawny grasses speckled with dark seedheads.

and for winter

By choosing the right plants, your garden can look fantastic in summer and winter, as designer Tom Stuart-Smith proves in the spectacular garden of Mount St John in Yorkshire

WORDS **MATTHEW WILSON** PHOTOGRAPHS **JANE SEBIRE**

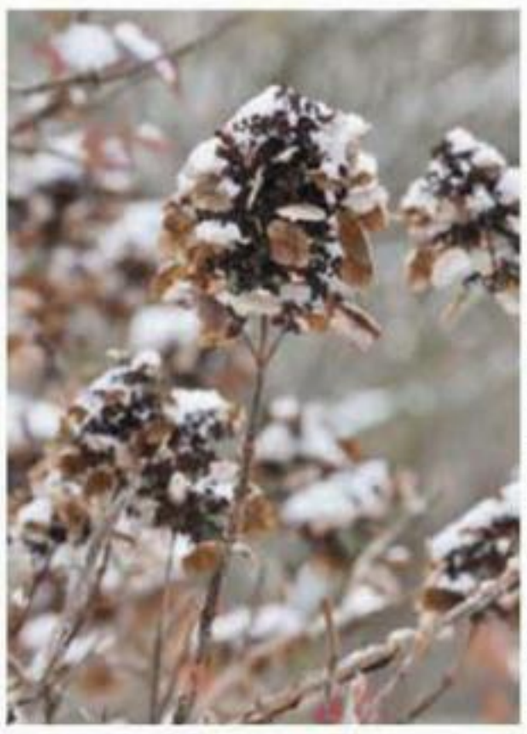
Plants for summer & winter

Designer Tom Stuart-Smith has packed the gardens at Mount St John with plants that look colourful for months in summer, before their flowers turn into decorative seedheads in winter. Here are six of the best

MARIANNE MAJERUS

1 ***Eryngium alpinum***

Thistle-like flowers in steel-blue or white from July to autumn, fading to brown in winter. Prefers well-drained soil and full sun. 70cm tall.



MARK BOLTON / GAP PHOTOS; STEFFEN HAUSER / ALAMY

2 ***Hydrangea quercifolia***

The oak-leaved hydrangea bears white flowers from midsummer to autumn and striking seedheads in winter. Sun or part shade. 2m tall.

3 ***Achillea filipendulina* 'Cloth of Gold'**

Flowers from early summer to early autumn; bears distinctive flattened seedheads in winter. Plant in well-drained soil in full sun. 1.5m tall. ▷

Perched on the side of the hills that roll up toward Sutton Bank and the North Yorkshire Moors beyond, Mount St John has had a commanding view over the Vale of York since it was built from sandstone in 1720 for the Rev William Elsley on the ancient site of a temple of the Knights of St John. In the intervening three centuries the house and grounds have passed through various hands and undergone numerous revisions. The present owners, the Blundell family, have carried out extensive improvements to the property and grounds, including the restoration of a walled kitchen garden, complete with glasshouses and workshops (see issue 139).

At the side of the main house a large area of garden had remained virtually untouched through this process of improvement. Extending to around three acres, it comprised two large sweeping areas of lawn made into broad terraces. One terrace was a fairly regular rectangle hemmed in by yew hedging to create a formal, enclosed garden; the other more loosely formed with the topography gradually declining toward the end of the garden, marked by a steep drop to the pastures below. The once wide-reaching views out on to the vale – York Minster is visible on clear days – had become partially obscured by a bank of trees grown along the top of this escarpment as a wind break.

A new look

Keen to transform the garden completely, the Blundells turned to designer Tom Stuart-Smith. Now, five years after most of the building and planting was completed, the garden is maturing into one of the finest in North Yorkshire, in summer or winter.

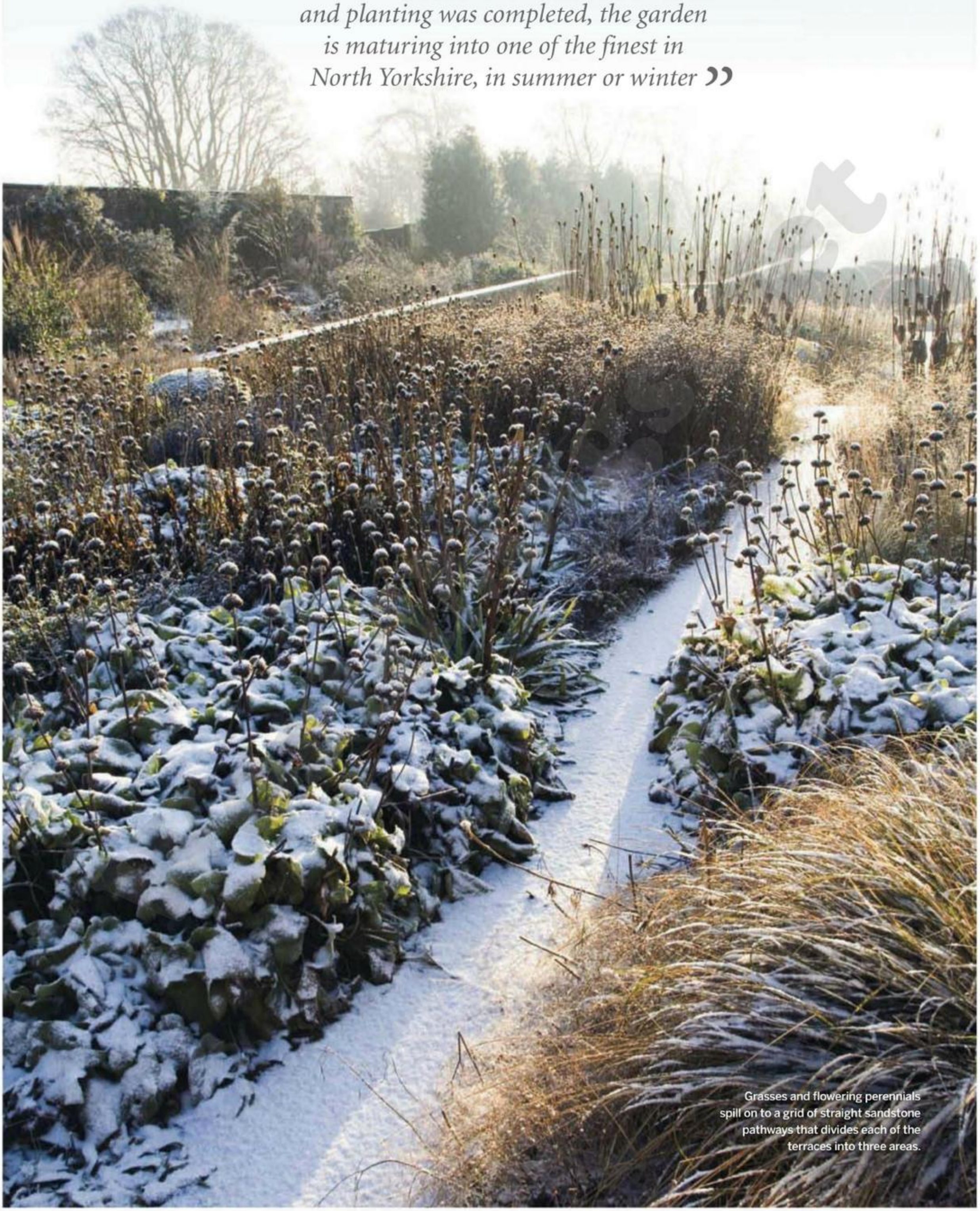
Informed by the revised façade of the house – half traditional, half contemporary – Tom took the terraces and created two new but closely connected gardens. One garden references the history of the house and the traditions of clipped yew hedges, fine turf and herbaceous borders. The other is a celebration of modern perennial planting, bold structural plants and superbly executed hard landscaping. For Tom the greatest challenge was to make a garden "in the face of such a view, without it looking like a doormat to the panorama. I have tried to make a very engaging doormat."

The contemporary garden is formed from a series of terraces that recede into the landscape and the far-reaching views. To achieve this, levels were adjusted by moving around sub-soil and topsoil with heavy machinery, and the terraces built from block work clad in smooth-sawn, pale buff sandstone. These sandstone walls not only do the practical job of holding back the soil contained within the terraces, they also help to form a series of separate spaces in what might otherwise be an overwhelming experience. Tom designed the retaining walls to be wide enough to walk on. Straight lines rule; they help to isolate specific views and draw the eye, but as Tom explains, "despite its formal, linear structure much of the planting is designed on the diagonal – the spherical shapes of beech and box are planned as a movement across the grain of the garden, which is an important counterpoint to the formality, and much more evident in winter."

Planting secrets

The planting features Tom's renowned blend of perennials with shrubs and trees for structure. Nearest the house is a huge expanse of what appears in summer to be an exclusively perennial planting; large drifts of *Phlomis russeliana*, *Deschampsia cespitosa* ▷

“ Five years after most of the building and planting was completed, the garden is maturing into one of the finest in North Yorkshire, in summer or winter ”



Grasses and flowering perennials spill on to a grid of straight sandstone pathways that divides each of the terraces into three areas.

Plants for summer & winter

JO WHITWORTH / GAP PHOTOS

4 ***Selinum wallichianum***
Flowers from midsummer to autumn; in winter it bears attractive dried umbels. Moist, well-drained soil in sun or part shade. 1.8m tall.

MARIANNE MAJERUS

5 ***Miscanthus sinensis* 'Malepartus'**
Bears silky red sprays of flowers in August, which turn into fluffy plumes of seeds by winter. Any soil; up to 2.2m tall.

CAROLE DRAKE, PERNILLA BERGDAHL / GAP PHOTOS

6 ***Eryngium agavifolium***
Tall, architectural stems bear clusters of flowers that turn to dark seedheads in winter. Moist, well-drained soil, full sun. 1.5m tall.

> *"as winter takes hold, perennials retreat to the soil and grasses take on skeletal forms. Domes of clipped box emerge, imposing a structure on the planting"*

▷ 'Goldhange', *Salvia* x *sylvestris* 'Mainacht' and *Geum* 'Mrs J. Bradshaw' with vertical accents of *Eremurus* 'Pinocchio' and *Eryngium yuccifolium*. But as winter takes hold, perennials retreat to the soil and grasses take on skeletal forms. Domes of clipped box emerge, imposing a structure on the planting.

The key role that grasses play in the winter garden is arguably even more significant than their summer function, when they serve primarily as textural foils to exuberantly colourful flowering plants. Their reduced winter form and bleached straw colouring punctuates the winter scene again and again, creating numerous resting points for the eye and suggesting the colour of the sandstone walls and the rougher textured sandstone of the old house. The loose form of the grasses also helps to animate the rigid geometry of the garden, which is even more apparent in winter.

The pool and grass terrace

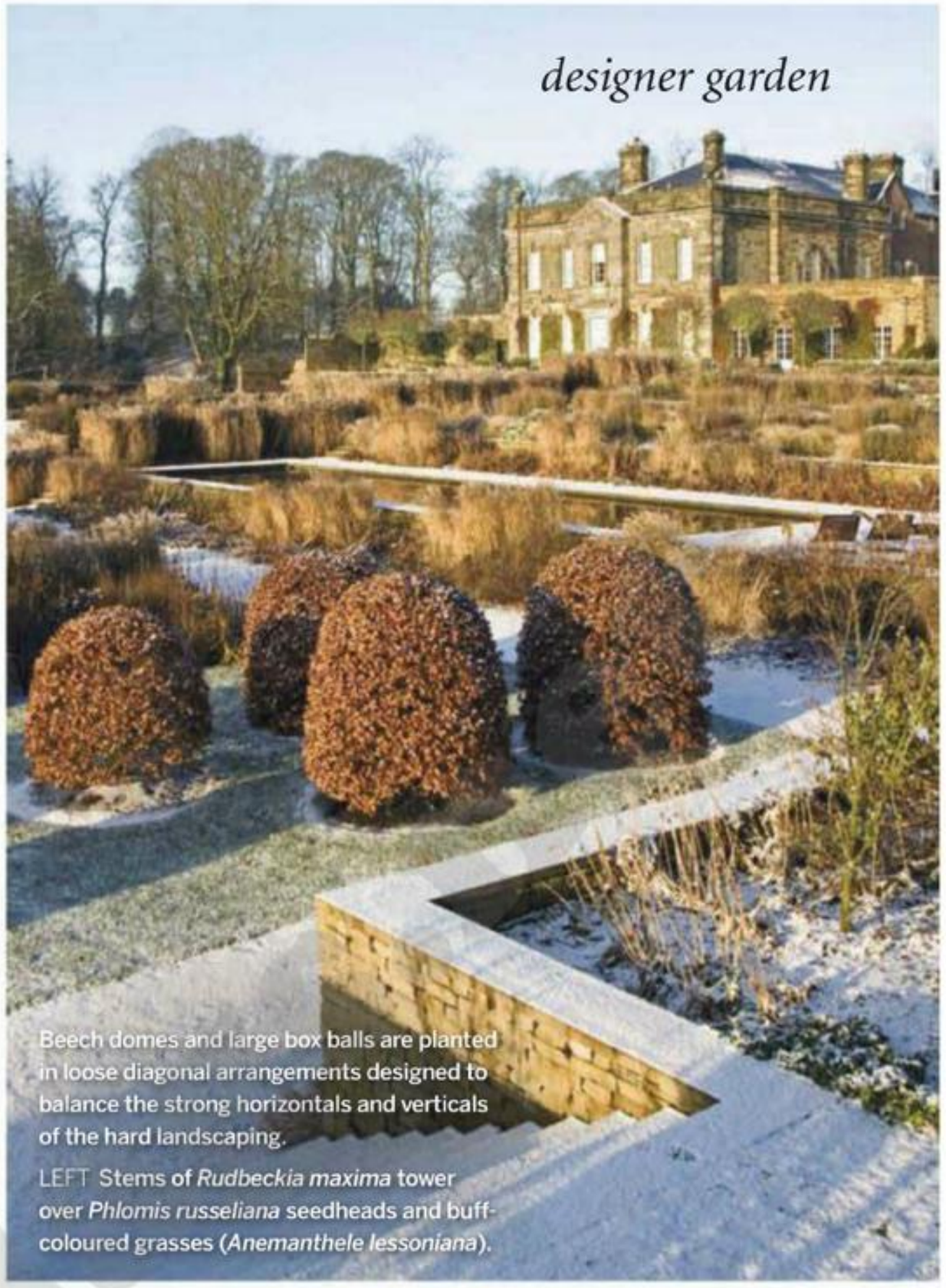
The middle of the series of descending terraces is dominated by a large rectangular pool crisply edged in sandstone (pictured right). An area of beautifully executed decking serves as a seating and sunbathing area. From here the summer views back to the house and out to the vale are breathtaking, while in winter the black sheen of the water adds depth to an inevitably flatter scene and heightens light levels. It's a sophisticated way of changing the rhythm of the garden.

The last hurrah of the garden, a final grass terrace, is planted with *Miscanthus sinensis* 'Kleine Silberspinne' in a pattern drawn from the fields in the view beyond – as they would have been in the mid-19th century. In late winter the *Miscanthus* is left standing as a memorial to this vanished landscape.

Beneath the pool an avenue of clipped, dome-topped beech set in mown grass creates a voluptuous allée on the lower terrace, framing a view to the vale and suggesting in foliage form the clouds above them. These are reflected in a triple-tiered planting of box that wraps around a long bench seat in a cloudy embrace (pictured opposite, bottom right). In summer both beech and box provide a green pause in the composition, but in winter they come right to the fore.

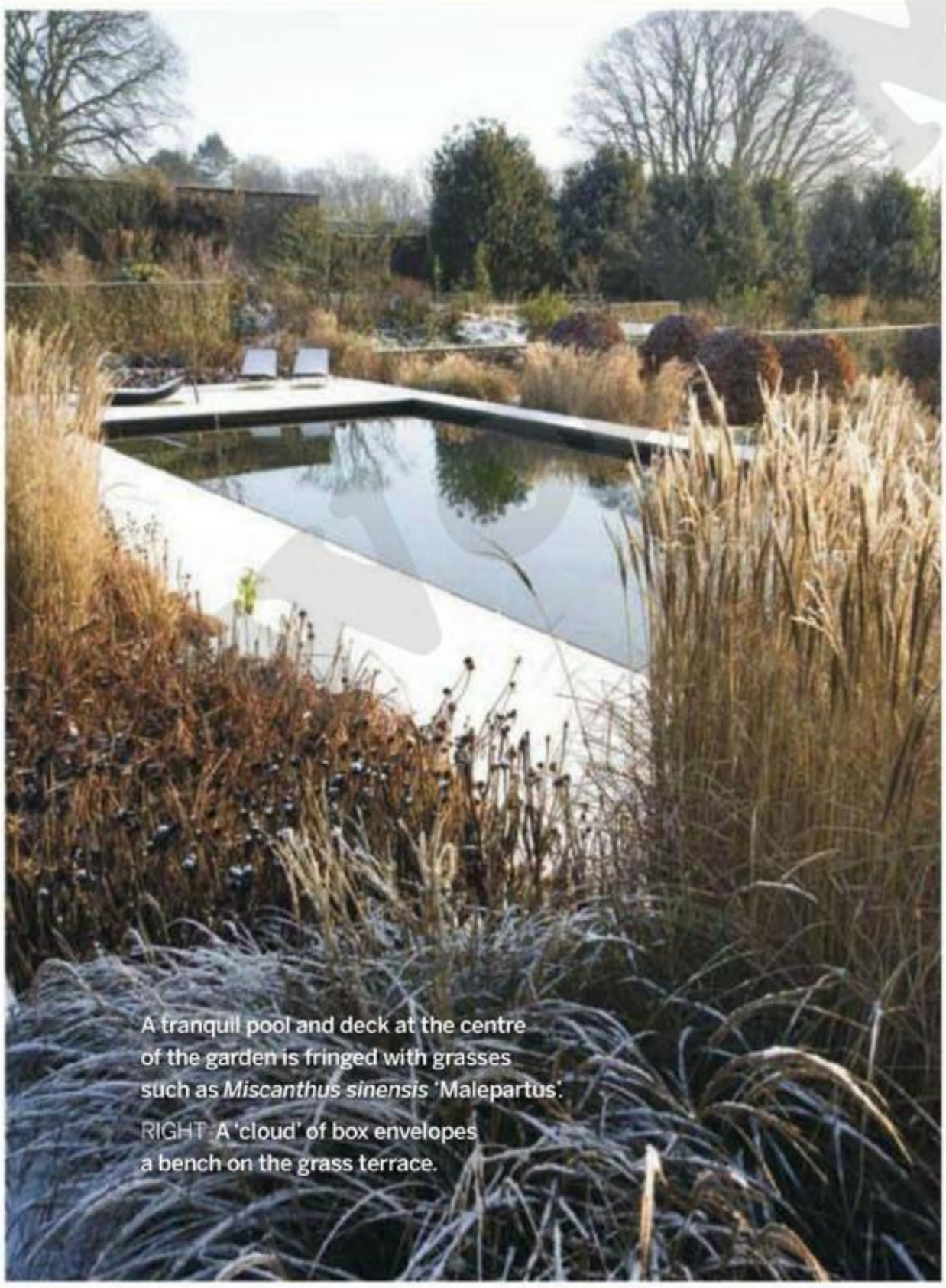
If anything, Mount St John demonstrates that specific plants are not the only way to make your gardens beautiful in winter. Instead you can achieve great things with good design, high quality materials, a backbone of structural plants and simply allowing your perennials to live – and die – with style.

• Turn the page for five ideas to help your garden look good all year. ▷



Beech domes and large box balls are planted in loose diagonal arrangements designed to balance the strong horizontals and verticals of the hard landscaping.

LEFT Stems of *Rudbeckia maxima* tower over *Phlomis russeliana* seedheads and buff-coloured grasses (*Anemanthele lessoniana*).



A tranquil pool and deck at the centre of the garden is fringed with grasses such as *Miscanthus sinensis* 'Malepartus'.

RIGHT A 'cloud' of box envelopes a bench on the grass terrace.

Purple *Salvia x sylvestris* 'Blauhügel' and deep red flower buds of *Origanum* 'Rosenkuppel' look colourful for months in summer, but fade by winter, when the surrounding grasses and perennials with striking seedheads become more prominent.

Five ideas to help your garden look good all year

1 **Your planting should have a backbone of solid performers** that provide long-term colour and textural interest. Combine with plants that have strong but short seasonal interest – the shooting stars.

2 **Grasses are almost unbeatable for longevity of interest,** starting in spring when the foliage begins to form and continuing until flowering and well beyond into winter. The fading straw yellow to grey-white culms of grasses provide wonderful accents, seemingly 'conducting' the low winter sunlight.

3 **Good quality hard landscaping** – including paths, walls and steps – provides a framework in summer, but really comes into its own in winter, imposing order on the declining plants that it contains.

4 **Choose woody plants that excel in winter**. Opt for deciduous trees or shrubs whose stems have a satisfying shape, colour or texture. Evergreen or deciduous topiary planted for structure may be recessive in summer, but really comes into its own once the surrounding vegetation has died down in winter.

5 **Plant perennials that look interesting in summer and winter** – either for their stem shape or attractive seedheads.

Leaving perennials and grasses standing through winter can result in a wonderful blend of subtle hues, skeletal shapes and seedheads. You needn't cut them back until spring arrives – unless the winter weather renders them too messy to live with.

Five examples

1 **Box balls**
In winter a series of huge domes of clipped box (*Buxus sempervirens*) lead the eye from one to the other and provide a contrast in volume and greenness to the declining perennials.

2 ***Panicum virgatum* 'Shenandoah'**
From August, this grass produces a haze of inflorescences that catch the sunlight and remain through winter, when they combine well with perennial seedheads.

3 **Perfect paving**
The sandstone paving and walling at Mount St John have been expertly executed and in their exposed winter state contribute significantly to the overall success of the garden.

4 **Beech**
Although deciduous, beech retains enough dead foliage through winter to give clipped specimens a distinctly architectural form. You can achieve similar results with hornbeam.

5 ***Phlomis russeliana***
This perennial bears straight stems that are punctuated with spherical yellow flowers in summer and attractive seedheads in winter, here silhouetted against the light reflected by the pool. □

A handmade Christmas

Make your own unique natural decorations using stems and flowers

WORDS **ANNEMARIE JAKOBSEN & INGER SKAARUP** PHOTOGRAPHS **HEIDI LERKENFELDT**

Peace wreath

◁ Willow stems don't normally bear catkins until late winter or spring, but you can usually buy forced stems from florists.

MATERIALS

- **medium-gauge wire**
- **wire snips**
- **brown florist's tape**
- **thin, pliable willow stems, cut into randomly-sized lengths**
- **garden shears**
- **medium-gauge florist's wire**

TO MAKE Using a piece of wire, make a circle and fix in place by wrapping the ends together. Wrap florist's tape around the wire. Add willow, one piece at a time, securing to the wreath with small pieces of florist's wire.

Green ice crystal

The base of this decoration must be strong: use bamboo or heavy wire. Display in a window, inside or outside, or hang on a door or wall. Add a string of electric lights to make it sparkle.

MATERIALS

- **3 thin bamboo sticks, each 45cm long, wrapped in green florist's tape**
- **fir boughs, cut into 12 branch tips and a handful of small side branches**
- **medium-gauge florist's wire**
- **garden shears**

TO MAKE **Attach florist's wire firmly to one end of a bamboo stick. Place a fir branch on the stick, lining up the tips of each. Fix in place with florist's wire, hiding the wire between the fir needles. Flip the stick over and attach another fir branch tip. Add small pieces of fir stem until you reach the middle of the stick. Secure wire and cut. Attach greenery to the opposite end of the stick, then repeat with remaining sticks. Finish by placing sticks on top of each other in the shape of an ice crystal. Secure firmly with florist's wire where sticks cross. Conceal the wire with a few small pieces of fir.**

Flower wreath

If the wreath hangs in a cool place out of direct sun, the hellebores will last for ten to 12 days. Use silk flowers for a more long-lasting decoration. If time is short, buy a finished twig wreath from a florist or hobby shop and add the flowers yourself.

MATERIALS

- **40-60cm long, thin, pliable willow stems without side-branches**
- **medium-gauge florist's wire**
- **garden shears**
- **hellebore flowers**

TO MAKE Gather five to six willow stems and bend into a circle about 30-35cm in diameter. Fix in place with small pieces of florist's wire. Set aside and repeat 10-12 times. Fit the circles into and on top of each other, making a dense, neatly rounded wreath. Fix in place by wrapping tightly with florist's wire. Use a bit more florist's wire to make a loop for hanging the wreath. Attach flowers by carefully weaving stems through branches.

Green heart

This pretty juniper heart is robust and long-lasting; displayed it indoors or outside. To hang it in a window, cover both sides of the heart with greenery. For a denser look, add more juniper boughs.

MATERIALS

- **thin or medium-gauge wire, about 50cm long**
- **wire snips**
- **green or brown florist's tape**
- **garden shears**
- **juniper stems**
- **thin or medium-gauge florist's wire**
- **ribbon**
- **scissors**

TO MAKE Bend the wire into a heart shape and fix in place by wrapping wire ends together. Wrap florist's tape around the wire. Cut the juniper stems into small pieces. Gather two or three pieces into a small bouquet and place it on the wire at the top point of the heart. Secure by wrapping with florist's wire. Gather another small bouquet and place on the wire so that the top overlaps the stem ends of the first bunch. Secure with florist's wire. Continue to the heart's lower point. Repeat process for the other half of the heart. If the decoration is going to be seen from both sides, flip the heart over and repeat.

Snow-dusted wreath

Although this unique rustic wreath is not difficult to make, it requires time, patience and a lot of small sticks.

MATERIALS

- **thin birch branches**
- **garden shears**
- **straw wreath base, 30-35cm in diameter**
- **medium-gauge florist's wire**
- **spray snow**

TO MAKE Cut the branches into 10-15cm long sticks. Gather a handful of sticks, place on the inside edge of the straw wreath base and attach securely by wrapping with florist's wire. Gather another handful, place next to the first bundle and wrap with florist's wire. Repeat across the wreath, attaching the last bundle on the outside edge of the straw wreath base. Start adding another row of sticks, placing them so they slightly overlap the first row. Continue across the wreath. Repeat until the straw wreath base is completely covered. Shape with garden shears, if needed. Finish with a dusting of spray snow, following the directions on the can.

Midnight star

Hang the star on a door or wall, or display it on a shelf as a rustic contrast to glass or silver candlesticks. The star in the photograph measures about 50cm from point to point. If the moss and lichen-covered branches are very dry they will snap easily. Soaking them in water for 12 to 24 hours before making the decoration should make them more pliable.

MATERIALS

- **branches with moss or lichen**
- **garden shears**
- **thin-gauge florist's wire**

TO MAKE Arrange the branches in a star shape, making sure the points are evenly spaced. Secure where the branches cross using small pieces of florist's wire. □

In brief

WHAT ***Ilex***, a genus of around 400 species of evergreen and deciduous trees and shrubs.
COMMON NAME **Holly.**
ORIGINS **An estimated 400 species mainly from tropical and temperate Asia and America. The so-called English holly, *I. aquifolium*, is also native to western and southern Europe and North Africa.**
SEASON **Autumn and winter fruits.**
SIZE **Height varies from 60cm to 25m.**
CONDITIONS **Most are easy to grow, in sun or half-shade and average garden soil.**

Holly

Lustrous leaves and bright berries make hollies fantastic garden plants in winter. But what kinds should you plant? Roy Lancaster names the best

WORDS **ROY LANCASTER** PHOTOGRAPHS **JASON INGRAM**

ILEX x AQUIPERNYI
DRAGON LADY (='MESCHICK')
A small tree or shrub of dense, narrow columnar habit with dark shoots, smaller, spiny leaves and red berries. H 6m.

Roy Lancaster is a plantsman, planthunter and president of the Hardy Plant Society. He is also an author and lecturer, and was awarded an OBE in 1999 for services to horticulture.

Before I dip into the wider world of hollies I must admit to a lifelong interest in the tree that bears the crown. Ever since my childhood in the North Country and long before I became a gardener or even a student of our native flora, I was aware of this shining evergreen prickly leaved tree whose red berries brightened the long winter days. With the robin, it shared our Christmas celebration, on the cards that tumbled through our letterbox, and in the forms of sprigs placed above picture frames on our living room walls.

In those innocent, far-off days I was oblivious to the sex life of the holly, to the fact that it bears male and female flowers on separate trees, and that to obtain berries a male tree must pollinate the female.

The 400 or so species of holly include both evergreen and deciduous plants, with leaves varying in size and shape, with or without spines. Most species bear red berries (technically drupes) while others, such as *Ilex macrocarpa* and *I. crenata*, are black. Few of these wild hollies are in general cultivation; there are around 20 in the *RHS Plant Finder*.

Far more numerous in our gardens are cultivars of the English holly, *I. aquifolium*, and those of its hybrid with *I. perado*. These are known as the Highclere hollies or *I.* x *altaclerensis*, after the Hampshire estate where one of the original seedlings is said to have occurred. They encompass a bewildering range of evergreen trees and shrubs that vary in size, habit, foliage (green or variegated) and berry (red or yellow). There are also many hybrids and cultivars of other hollies, especially those of the small-leaved *I. crenata*. The result is a wide selection of plants (151 in the *RHS Plant Finder*) that includes plants suitable for formal and informal gardens, as specimens in lawn, border or woodland as well as hedges and screens.

Green-leaved female hollies

The free-fruiting *Ilex* x *koehneana* 'Chestnut Leaf' (overleaf) is my favourite of all hollies. Another classic specimen holly, of similar size and habit, is *I.* x *altaclarensis* 'Camelliifolia', with dark purple shoots, large, dark, polished foliage and bold red berries. *I. aquifolium* ▷

▷ 'J.C. van Tol' (below right) yields reliable crops of red berries, while *I. aquifolium* 'Bacciflava' is the best yellow-berried English holly. Red-berried 'Pyramidalis' and yellow 'Pyramidalis Fructu-luteo' make erect, conical specimen trees.

Variegated hollies

Ilex aquifolium 'Handsworth New Silver' is my favourite variegated holly for its stately, pyramidal habit, slender, cream-margined leaves on purple shoots and reliable crops of red berries. 'Argentea Marginata' is commonly available, and is free-fruiting.

I. aquifolium 'Madame Briot' is one of the most beautiful of all variegated hollies for its purple shoots, large, strongly spiny, deep-yellow marbled and margined leaves and reliable red fruits; *I. aquifolium* 'Rubricaulis Aurea' is more compact and slower-growing with neatly toothed, gold-margined leaves on purple shoots and red berries. For collectors I recommend *I. aquifolium* 'Flavescens' (see page 63).

The stronger-growing *I.* x *altaclerensis* cultivars include 'Golden King' and my favourite, 'Ripley Gold' (page 63).

Two of the finest variegated male hollies are also two of the oldest. *Ilex aquifolium* 'Golden Queen' has large, spine-toothed leaves with gold margins and splashes, and 'Silver Queen' has smaller, creamy white, spine-toothed leaves set on dark purple shoots.

Narrow, upright females

Ilex aquifolium 'Green Pillar' forms a dense, narrow column with green, spiny leaves and red berries; *I. aquifolium* 'Alaska' (opposite) is more vigorous. *I.* x *altaclerensis* 'Belgica Aurea' (page 63), with yellow-margined leaves, excels as a strong-growing specimen holly for larger gardens. Equally effective in smaller gardens are two narrow, columnar forms of the small-leaved evergreen Japanese holly, *I. crenata* – 'Sky Pencil' and 'Fastigiata'. *Ilex aquifolium* 'Angustifolia' has male and female forms that are narrow, neat, small-leaved and desirable. □

• Roy's choices of *Ilex* continue over the next five pages. ▷

***ILEX AQUIFOLIUM* 'HARPUNE'**
A distinctive female holly of German origin with a columnar habit and small, narrow, relatively smooth but spine-tipped leaves and small bright red berries. H 3m+

***I. AQUIFOLIUM* 'PENDULA'**
This female develops a broad, umbrella-shaped crown, with numerous branches drooping to the ground. Prickly, dark green leaves and rich purple shoots. H 3m+

***I. AQUIFOLIUM* 'J.C. VAN TOL'**
This female of Dutch origin has relatively smooth leaves and reliable crops of red berries, produced without the need of a pollinator. AGM*. H 5m+

***I.* x *KOEHNEANA* 'CHESTNUT LEAF'**
My favourite holly needs space to develop its broad-based, dense column, clothed with large, glossy, boldly veined and spine-toothed leaves. Free-fruiting. AGM. H 10m+

* HOLDS AN AWARD OF GARDEN MERIT FROM THE ROYAL HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY

***ILEX AQUIFOLIUM* 'ALASKA'**
A vigorous, broadly columnar or narrowly conical tree with both prickly and smooth green leaves. It is also free-fruiting, even on young plants. AGM H 8m+

***ILEX AQUIFOLIUM* 'BACCIFLAVA'**
Probably the best yellow-berried English holly, this is very effective when used with orange-berried *I.* x *aquifolium* 'Amber' and red-berried hollies in a mixed hedge. H 8m+

“Most hollies are easily cultivated in sun or half-shade in an average garden soil”

***ILEX AQUIFOLIUM* ‘FLAVESCENS’**
The moonlight holly has plentiful red berries and leaves that are suffused with pale yellow and especially effective when young. Best in full sun. H 5m+

***I.* x *ALTACLERENSIS* ‘RIPLEY GOLD’**
This cultivar has smooth gold-splashed leaves and abundant red berries. May produce green-leaved reversions which should be pruned away when still small. H 8m+

***ILEX* x *ALTACLERENSIS* ‘BELGICA AUREA’**
Strong growing female holly of conical habit with bold usually spineless, glossy-green leaves with a striking cream to creamy-yellow margin. AGM. H 8-10m+

***I. AQUIFOLIUM* ‘LAURIFOLIA AUREA’**
A male holly that makes a reliable pollinating partner, ensuring that female hollies bear berries. Suited to gardens of intermediate size. H 8m+

Growing hollies

Most hollies are easily cultivated in sun or half-shade in an average garden soil, alkaline to acidic, avoiding extremes of wet or dry.

Most evergreen hollies flower in spring, in the leaf axils of the previous year’s shoots.

The flowers are small, with four petals. Male flowers are produced in crowded clusters with prominent pollen-covered stamens; females have prominent green ovaries.

Male and female flowers are found on separate trees. A non-fruiting holly might be a male plant or a female plant with no pollinating male within bee-range.

Any male holly should be able to pollinate females of the English and Highclere hollies. Sometimes a male holly from a neighbouring garden will do the trick, but if space permits, it is worth planting a male cultivar as a companion nearby.

Reliable pollinators for large spaces include *I.* x *altaclerensis* ‘Hodginsii’; in middle-sized spaces try *I. aquifolium* ‘Laurifolia’ or the gold-margined *I. aquifolium* ‘Laurifolia Aurea’ (pictured left).

Hollies for hedges

Holly hedges are one of the joys of British gardens. Most of the hardy evergreen hollies available in the UK can be used as a hedge or screen but few can match the English holly for all-round quality and effect. Most cultivars of *I. aquifolium*, particularly those of a dense, bushy nature, will soon knot together to form a hedge of rich texture. Plant young, at 60cm tall or so, and 60-75cm apart in the row, preferably in autumn. Once established, keep in shape by trimming annually in August with shears or a hedge-trimmer.

Where to see

- The National Arboretum, Westonbirt, Tetbury, Gloucestershire GL8 8QS. Tel 01666 880220, www.forestry.gov.uk/westonbirt
- RHS Garden Rosemoor. National Collection holder. Torrington, Devon EX38 8PH. Tel 01805 624067, www.rhs.org.uk/gardens/rosemoor
- RHS Garden Wisley, Woking, Surrey GU23 6QB. Tel 0845 260 9000, www.rhs.org.uk/Gardens/Wisley
- Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, Inverleith Road, Edinburgh EH3 5LR. Tel 0131 552 7171, www.rbge.org.uk
- Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, Richmond, Surrey TW9 3AB. Tel 020 8332 5655, www.kew.org
- The Savill and Valley Gardens, Wick Lane, Englefield Green, Surrey TW20 0UU. Tel 01753 860222, www.theroyallandscape.co.uk
- The Sir Harold Hillier Gardens and Arboretum, Jermyns Lane, Ampfield, Hampshire SO51 0QA. Tel 01794 369317, www3.hants.gov.uk/hilliergardens

Where to buy

- Farmyard Nurseries, Dol Llan Road, Llandysul, Carmarthenshire SA44 4RL. Tel 01559 363389, www.farmyardnurseries.co.uk
- Highfield Hollies, Liss, Hampshire GU33 7NH. Tel 01730 892372, www.highfieldhollies.com
- Larch Cottage Nursery, Melkinthorpe, Penrith, Cumbria CA10 2DR. Tel 01931 712404, www.larchcottage.co.uk
- Mallet Court Nursery, Curry Mallet, Somerset TA3 6SY. Tel 01823 481493, www.malletcourt.co.uk

Thanks to...

Highfield Hollies, where the plants in this feature were photographed. For details see *Where to buy*, above.

***ILEX AQUIFOLIUM* 'AMBER'**

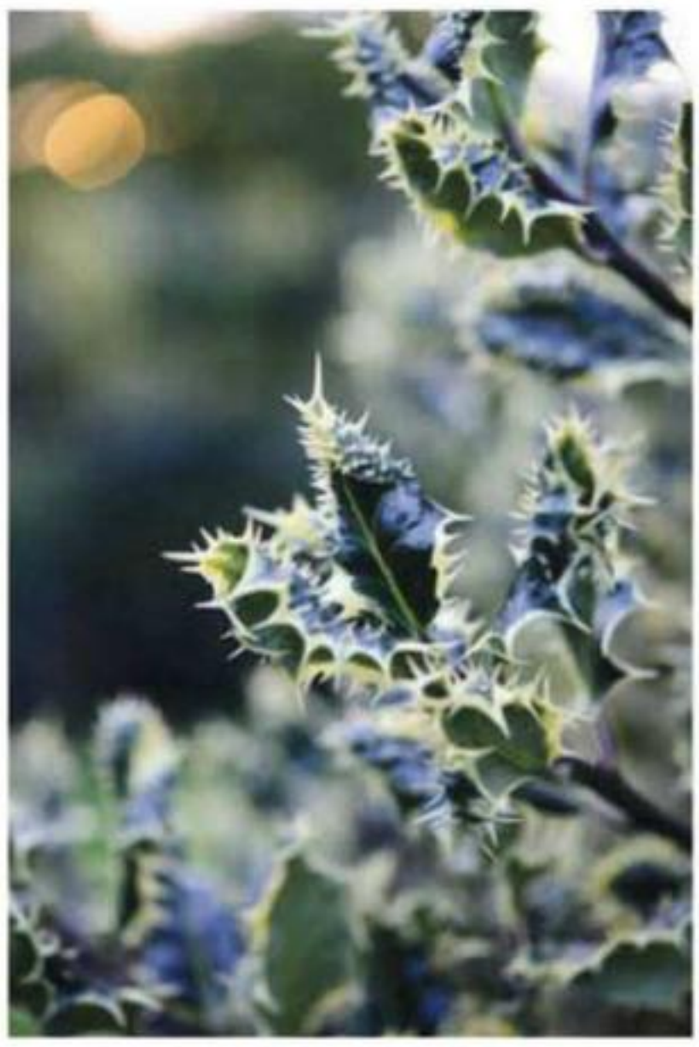
The long-lasting orange berries are freely borne among glossy, dark green, almost spineless leaves. It makes a handsome large bush or tree. AGM. H 6-8m+

***I.* x *ALTACLERENSIS* 'HODGINSII'**

Strong-growing male with purple shoots and large, glossy leaves. A reliable pollinating partner for fruit-bearing female hollies. Best suited to large spaces. AGM. H 14m.

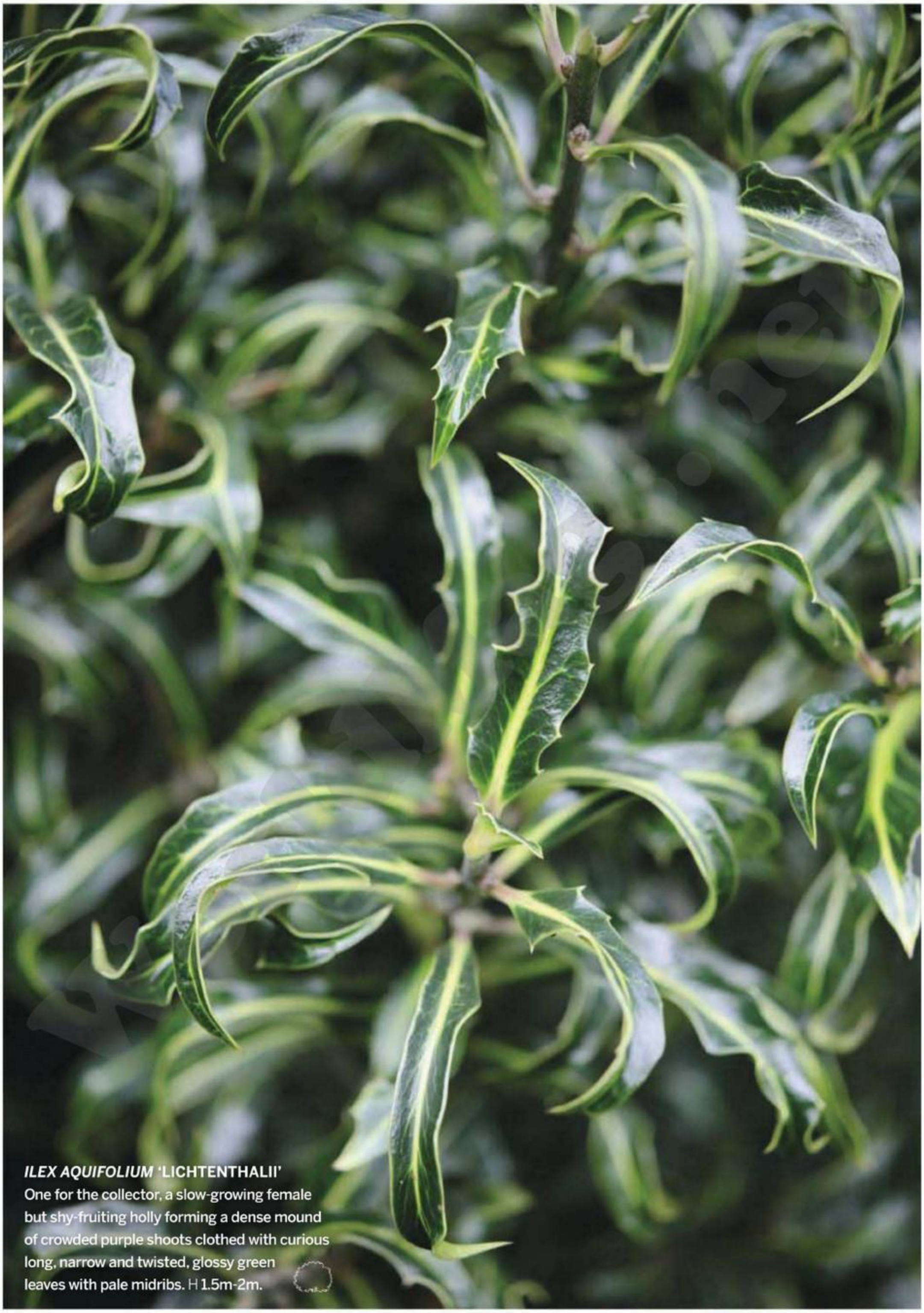
***I. AQUIFOLIUM* 'SILVER LINING'**

A female holly of recent introduction with an upright habit; the narrowly cream-margined, wavy leaves set on purple shoots are purple-flushed in winter. H 4m+



***I. AQUIFOLIUM* 'FEROX ARGENTEA'**

This popular dense-growing shrub bears small leaves with cream-coloured margins. Sterile male flowers. Good for small gardens. AGM. H 2-3m.



***ILEX AQUIFOLIUM* 'LICHTENTHALII'**
One for the collector, a slow-growing female but shy-fruiting holly forming a dense mound of crowded purple shoots clothed with curious long, narrow and twisted, glossy green leaves with pale midribs. H 1.5m-2m.

Peter Stafford

It's 21 years since the gardens at Heligan opened to the public, and to mark the anniversary we meet the gardens' wildlife-loving managing director

WORDS LIA LEENDERTZ PHOTOGRAPH CHARLIE HOPKINSON

The most famous story about The Lost Gardens of Heligan revolves around the gardeners' thunderboxes. You may know it: gardeners – using the same pencils they used to write plant labels – wrote their names on the wall of their loos. When one went away to fight in the First World War a cross was put next to his name. When they were officially missing or dead a second cross was added. All this was discovered during the garden's restoration, when a fluid used to uncover the names on faded plant labels was applied to the faint markings on the toilet wall. It is managing director Peter Stafford's favourite story about the garden: "I love the name, for a start. Thunderboxes! But also that they are right next to the south-facing Italian garden, where the family would sit and sun themselves. The whole area is an expression of the extraordinary hierarchy of the time, but reveals the gardeners' own lives and intimacies."

> *"It sounds odd, but I don't think we are perceived as a garden. We are more about history, atmosphere, ambience, even life and death"*

Peter has no horticultural background, but he has always had a strong association with the land, which has included nurturing his own 25-acre freshwater wetland site in Devon. He has a deep love of British wildlife, and his office is arrayed with pygmy shrew skeletons, stuffed foxes and mouse skulls: "I hope you're not squeamish," he says, handing me a pickled baby mole in a jar. "I have always been drawn to champion the underdog. Nobody knows moles, certainly nobody loves them. They are hidden away underground, and we curse them and trap them, but they are fascinating." As a 17-year-old amateur in 1967 he even succeeded in taking the first (and only) photographs of a live female mole underground with her young.

Peter had a varied career before Heligan. Having dropped out of medical school, he became a lorry driver, starting his own haulage business. One of his customers started a factory in Cornwall and he moved there as trainee salesman, eventually becoming marketing director. A freelance consultancy for the Department of Trade and Industry followed, advising businesses facing challenges. Clients included Heligan, whose owner Tim Smit – impressed with a report from Peter – asked him to stay on and implement it.

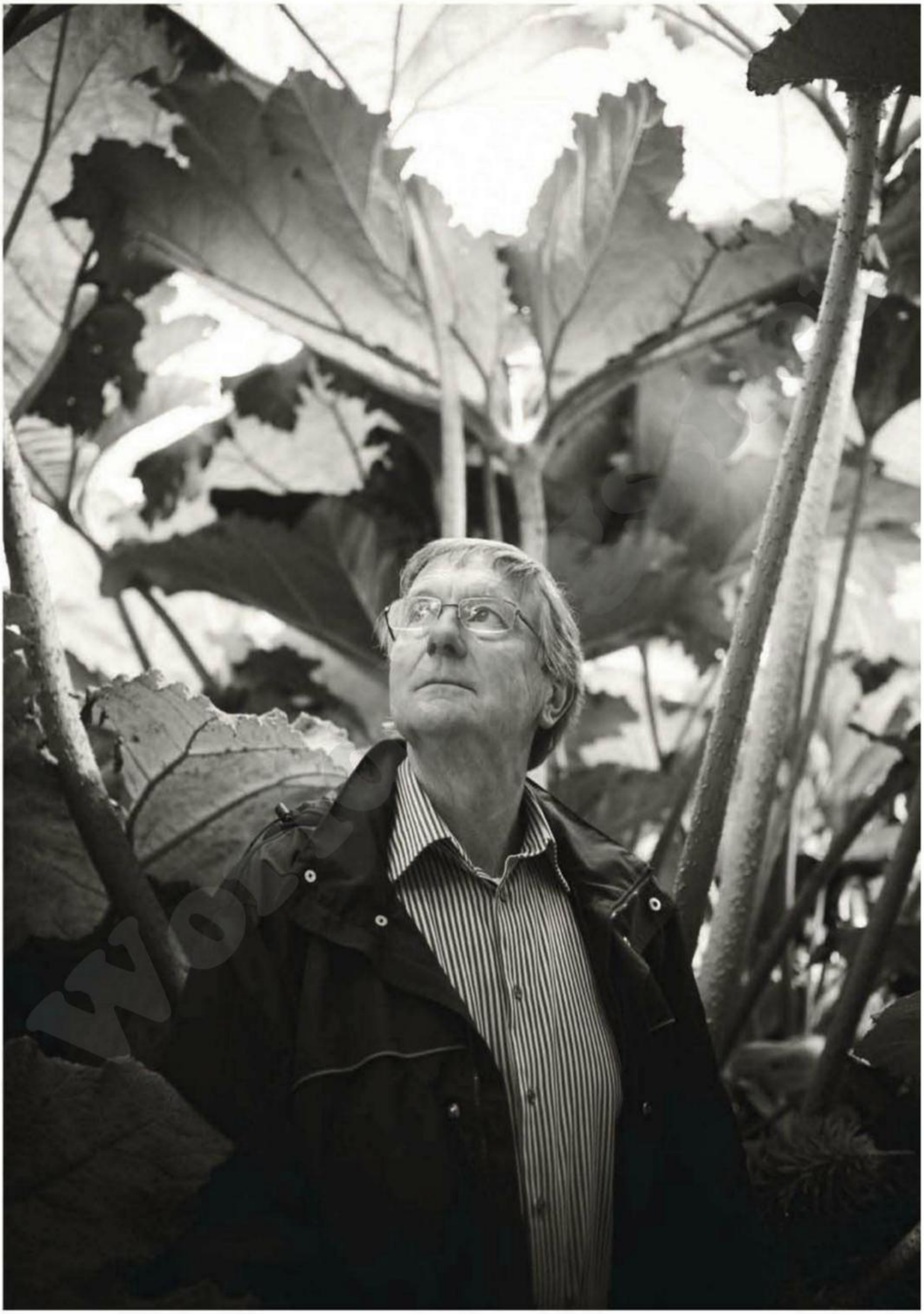
Heligan now gets vast numbers of visitors – a quarter of a million a year. It is a level of success that puzzles Peter slightly, although he has a theory: "It sounds odd, but I don't think we are perceived as a garden. We are more about history, atmosphere, ambience, even life and death." Part of Peter's role is as overseer of the garden, keeping this ambience intact. Heligan has no head gardener, quite deliberately. "The role of the head gardener is to stamp his own vision on a garden, and this garden has its own, very strong personality. It isn't appropriate for someone to come in and make it their own."

It gives Peter the freedom to take less obviously horticultural decisions, such as with the management of the spectacular, ancient rhododendrons surrounding the large open area of lawn known as Flora's Green, which have been infected with *Phytophthora ramorum*, sudden oak death. "Someone with a horticultural background might feel that the thing to do was cut them down, clear the bed, build a garden for the future, but it would completely take away the essence of the place." Instead he wants to leave them to die gracefully. "They have become a celebration of the fact that life goes through phases: youth, the beauty of maturity, and decline. Leaving them lets us appreciate that process." He leads me through the massive green facade of the rhododendrons into their dark, sculptural insides, where he has placed simple wooden benches. "It's just a way of showing people they are welcome to sit here a while and appreciate this. We don't advertise that they are here. If people are receptive, they find them."

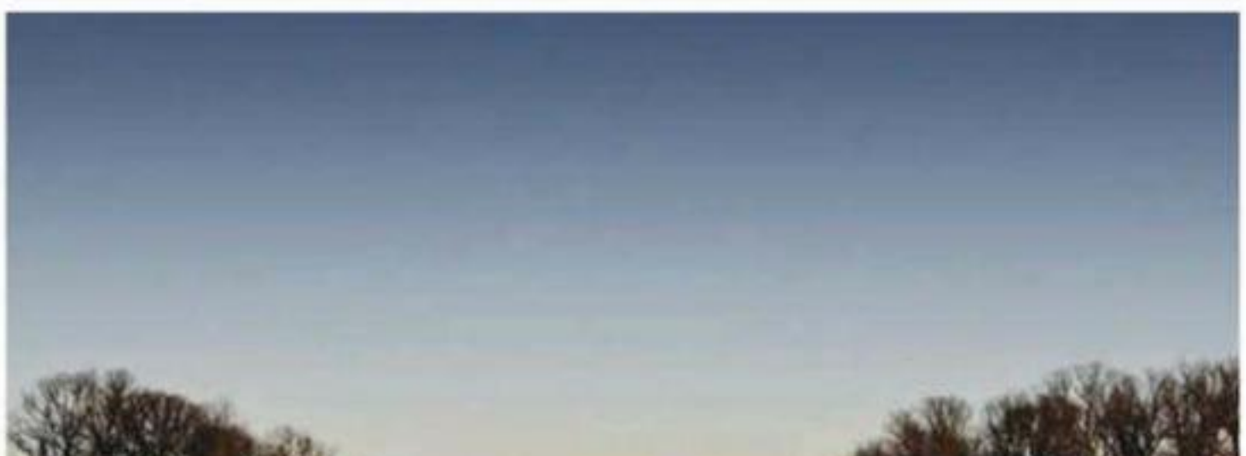
It is 21 years this year since the Lost Gardens of Heligan was 'found' by Tim Smit, and Peter has been managing director for 17 of those years, brought in as straight man to Tim's charismatic, ideas man. His lot has always been the practical side – the catering, car parks, accounting and loos, a task he has carried out admirably: all runs smoothly. But it is his sensitive stewardship of the romance of Heligan, and the careful uncovering of its hidden histories and inhabitants, that has helped secure the garden's place in our collective imaginations. □

• A series of events celebrating Heligan's 21st anniversary continues until Christmas – see www.heligan.com for details or call 01726 845100.

NEXT MONTH Chris & Toby Marchant.



Landscape architect Kim Wilkie describes the landform as 'an inverted grass pyramid'.



The once-neglected water gardens have been restored to their 18th-century glory.

The original landscape garden, created between the 1680s and 1749, covered 100 acres.

In brief

NAME Boughton House

WHAT Landscape gardens laid out before 1749, with modern additions made between 2007 and 2009.

WHERE Northamptonshire.

SIZE 100 acres.

SOIL Clay.

CONDITIONS Windy and exposed.

SPECIAL FEATURES Canals, landforms, parkland.

Glossy panels of water divide the open parkland of the estate and separate the 21st-century sunken landform from the Mount, its 18th-century companion beyond.

Reflected glory

A new landform by Kim Wilkie mirrors the 18th-century earthworks at Boughton House in Northamptonshire

WORDS **TIM RICHARDSON** PHOTOGRAPHS **JASON INGRAM**

"Visitors will be able to sit on the banks listening to music... It will be a place of stillness, sound, light and shadow"

Boughton House is one of Britain's greatest surviving formal landscape gardens, with a rare 'canalscape' of linked waterways, rather than just one long canal or piece of water as the centrepiece. Landscape designer Kim Wilkie was all too aware of this when he was asked by Richard Scott, the 9th Duke of Buccleuch, to think about a landscape feature that would have the strength to complement a garden design conceived on such a massive scale.

His solution was Orpheus, an astonishing landscape feature unveiled in 2009 to general acclaim and now thoroughly bedded down in terms of its turf overlay. It's a landform that mingles geometric clarity with mythic transcendence, although Kim says it is not necessary for visitors to understand the symbolism in order for them to enjoy it.

Kim came up with the sunken design in response to the Duke's desire to create a landscape feature on grass opposite a pyramidal mount believed to have been created by landscape designer Charles Bridgeman in 1724. Kim's plan was to create a mirror image of the mount, but going down instead of up. Visitors wandering the estate do not see the sunken space until they are almost upon it, though the steel-frame cube nearby alerts them to the fact something extraordinary is coming up.

Classical inspiration

A wide, shallow, grassy path leads down 7m to a dark, still square of water. Down here there is a sense of stillness and privacy. Meanwhile up at ground level, a spiralling rill swirls inside a rectangle etched into the ground in the perfect proportions of the 'golden section', which forms the basis for all classical and neoclassical architecture.

"The gardens balance land and water, rhythm and reflection, myth and geometry," Kim explains. "Orpheus continues the story, working with the formal structure to create a sculptural space for contemplation."

Kim says that the Orpheus myth came to mind following his initial impulse to create a subterranean feature. Orpheus is associated with the underworld because he descended there to rescue his lover, Eurydice, who had been killed by a snake. His music-making so delighted Hades that Eurydice was given the chance to follow Orpheus out of the underworld and so come back to life, on one condition: that Orpheus never looked back. This being Greek myth, it is not difficult to guess what happened next.

Rather than a place of sad contemplation, though, the Duke wants his Orpheus to be a space of merriment and enlightenment. To that end it is being used as a venue, fittingly enough, for concerts. As Kim says: "Visitors will be able to sit on the banks listening to music and watching the reflection of the sky in the pool at the bottom. It will be a place of stillness, sound, light and shadow."

A welcome challenge

Kim enjoys creating landforms. "I love working with shadow and mist and the times of day and year," he says. "It's nice when something can look quite flat and then come alive at a special moment. It's a very British thing, this delight in turf."

The technical problems of creating these features are far from straightforward. "These landforms have to be worked out in advance almost to the millimetre," Kim says. "If you want to get a good, crisp effect, it's a matter of complicated three-dimensional geometry and engineering – if you don't want it to slump and fall apart. We make plans, models and detailed sections on the computers."

Then there is the construction. "You need an extremely skilful digger driver to do it," Kim says. "There is only one driver in Britain who could have dug Orpheus – Colin Mortlock of Miles Waterscapes."

Kim's star continues to rise in the world of landscape – his latest big commission is the landscaping of the Chelsea Barracks site in London. In the meantime, his Orpheus landform at Boughton stands as a bold and austere contemporary statement that appears perfectly at home in the historic landscape. □

USEFUL INFORMATION

ADDRESS Boughton House, Kettering, Northamptonshire NN14 1BJ.
OPEN 2012: 7-9 April, 5-7 May, 2-5 June and daily in August. TEL 01536 515731
WEBSITE www.boughtonhouse.org.uk

Other landforms to visit

CLAREMONT LANDSCAPE GARDEN

The turf amphitheatre in the 18th-century landscape garden at Claremont is the most dramatic example of landform in Britain, and served as one of Kim Wilkie's inspirations. Portsmouth Road, Esher, Surrey KT10 9JG. Tel 01372 467806, www.nationaltrust.org.uk

LANDFORM UEDA

Scottish Gallery of Modern Art. Charles Jencks has made turf landforming his speciality. This one features swirling banks of turf and arc-shaped pools. 75 Belford Road, Edinburgh EH4 3DR. Tel 0131 624 6200, www.nationalgalleries.org

JUPITER ARTLAND

Another dramatic Jencks landform (themed on cell division), at this new, privately owned sculpture garden or 'artland'. Bonnington House Steadings, Wilkieston, Edinburgh EH27 8BB. Tel 01506 889900, www.jupiterartland.org

DEREK CROUCHER / THE NATIONAL TRUST PHOTOLIBRARY / ALAMY; KEITH HUNTER / ARCAID IMAGES / ALAMY; BRENDAN MACNEILL / ALAMY

Kim Wilkie

Landscape architect Kim Wilkie studied history at Oxford and environmental design at the University of California, Berkeley, before setting up his landscape studio in London in 1989. His recent work includes the V&A garden, Hyde Park Corner, the Thames Landscape Strategy and land sculptures at Heveningham Hall in Suffolk and Shawford Park. He recently unveiled his plans for the landscaping of the Chelsea Barracks site in London.

• Kim Wilkie Associates, 34 Friars' Stile Road, Richmond Upon Thames TW10 6NE.
Tel 020 8332 0304, www.kimwilkie.com

How to look after landforms

Now that the landform has been built and turfed it needs special care, as Lance Goffort-Hall, landscape manager at Boughton, knows only too well. "We mow it once a week from the end of March to the end of October," he says. "Twice a week if there is a special event." The garden team initially used hover mowers – suspended on ropes in the steepest areas – but now the grass is maturing Lance has invested in a remote-controlled mowing machine. "We're practising on it at the moment," he chuckles. The two acres of turf that form Orpheus are organically fertilised about six times a year, while the Mount receives similar treatment.

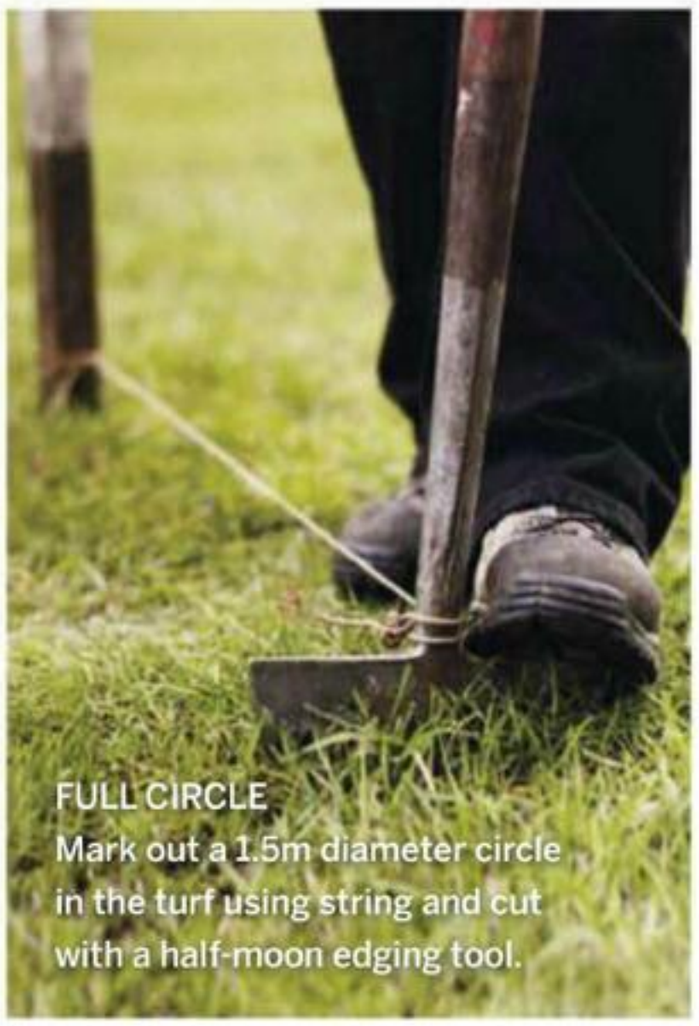
Tree-planting masterclass

The man responsible for the collection of 14,000 trees at Kew explains his tried and tested method

WORDS **TONY KIRKHAM** PHOTOGRAPHS **ANDREW MONTGOMERY**

Tony Kirkham oversees the planting of dozens of trees every year as part of his job as head of arboretum at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.

TOOLS
Having the right tools for the job, especially a good fork and spade, makes tree planting much easier.



FULL CIRCLE
Mark out a 1.5m diameter circle in the turf using string and cut with a half-moon edging tool.

TAKING UP THE TURF
Cut and lift the surplus turf using a turf float or spade, then discard or add to your compost heap.

One of my favourite operations in the calendar at Kew is tree planting. It's a privilege to lay the foundation stones for the future treescape in the arboretum, and to be able to watch these young plantings grow to maturity over the ensuing years.

Tree planting is both an art and a science. It's about giving those precious young specimens the best possible start in life. Investing some time and resources to get this right is well worthwhile.

The planting season for trees normally starts in October and runs through to April. Traditionally trees were usually planted bare-root, but with the advent of new technology in growing nursery stock, and the increasing availability of container-grown trees, there is now no restriction on when a tree can be planted, providing sound, post-planting maintenance can be given when needed.

At Kew we have recently moved the main planting season from spring to autumn. In recent years the spring weather has tended to be much drier and this has been a challenge to newly planted stock, requiring more irrigation. In contrast the soils in autumn are still warm and moist, and this encourages the tree to make a quick start, producing fresh new roots in preparation for rapid spring growth.

It's important that you choose good, healthy nursery stock from a reputable nursery. Don't rely on what the tree looks like above ground, but if possible check out the root system. If the tree is growing in a container, make sure the roots are fresh, not pot-bound.

Over recent years we have developed the perfect tree pit, which is shallow but wide, square not round, and made up of the soil excavated with no additional compost added. Most trees are staked when there is no need to, or over-staked with inappropriate materials. Planting depth is critical: probably the single most common reason for the loss of a young tree is that they are planted too deeply, with the soil level above the 'nursery line' or 'root collar'.

There's a Chinese proverb that says 'The best time to plant a tree was 50 years ago; the next best time is today'. Use these simple steps to successful tree planting, adapt them to your situation and success will follow, giving you lots of satisfaction.

Whips

STEP ONE
Whips are young trees up to 2.5m tall with no lateral branches and a fibrous, bare-root system. They are the cheapest, easiest and quickest trees to plant. Push the spade into the ground to the depth of the spit and move it from side to side to make a notch in the soil.

STEP TWO
Holding the stem of the tree, push the roots of the whip into the notch. Lift the whip up and down – this will encourage the roots to spread evenly. Then hold the whip in an upright position and, making sure the root collar is level with the surface, place a foot on either side of the whip and firm down the soil. ▷

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Bare-root

STEP ONE

Within your circle of cut turf, dig a square hole, the corners of which meet the edge of the circle. The hole should be a spit deep (the depth of your spade's blade), or the depth of the root ball if deeper. The corners of the square coax the tree roots into the soil beyond the hole, especially on clay or sandy soils, and discourage them from circling.

STEP TWO

On sunny or windy days, exposing the fibrous root system of a bare-root tree can cause damage within minutes, severely affecting its chances of establishing successfully. It is important to protect the roots at all times between lifting and planting with a proprietary planting bag or an ordinary black bin liner.

3

4

STEP THREE

Healthy trees that die after planting are usually killed by being planted too deep. With certain thin-barked species like birches, maples and ash, a few millimetres over the nursery mark will make the difference between survival and death. Use a straight edge across the pit to make sure of the correct planting level.

STEP FOUR

Adding compost and fertiliser to the soil is of no benefit. In fact it can actually be detrimental to the tree, because compost tends to dry out quickly, and to slump during decomposition, lowering the soil level. Fertiliser gives the newly planted tree a false start. However mycorrhizal tree-planting products applied directly to the root system can help the tree to get started.

Right tree, right place

Choosing the right tree for the right place is one of the most important decisions you can make in successful tree planting. Get it right and you will enjoy the rewards a healthy, happy tree provides; get it wrong and you will pay the consequences – you may even have to remove it.

IS THERE ENOUGH SPACE?

Identify the amount of surrounding space available, both above ground and below (it's important to allow room for root growth – see *Proximity to buildings*). Select a species or cultivar that will not out-grow the space when it reaches maturity.

SOIL CONDITIONS

Choose a tree with the appropriate qualities that match the local soil conditions. Is your soil acid or lime, wet or dry, clay or sandy? If a tree is happy with the soil type then planting success will easily follow.

PROXIMITY TO BUILDINGS, AND ACCESS

Planting a large tree may damage nearby buildings and other structures, or block rights of way. Make sure you choose a small tree that even when fully grown will not cause problems. A dense crown may cast deep shade; consider a tree whose crown is sparse enough to allow light to filter through to its surroundings.

ATTRIBUTES OF THE TREE

Decide what you want from a tree – size, spread, shape, leaf, bark, flower or fruit – and choose one that will prefer the conditions.

ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS

Check whether your preferred tree will tolerate the other environmental issues associated with the planting site. Is the site shady, subject to sea winds, or in a polluted urban location?

Container-grown

STEP ONE

Once the container is removed, exposing the root system, tease the roots out of the root ball. You may need to prune some of the roots, especially if they are slightly pot bound or circling the pot. This will encourage healthy root-growth outwards, towards the edge of the square tree pit.

STEP TWO

With the soil taken out of the hole, backfill the tree pit in layers around the root system, firming with the ball of the foot to the final level. If you are using a tree stake, ensure that the soil between the tree and the stake is also firmed, using the top of the spade handle.

STEP THREE

Once planted, add an organic mulch to the surface around the tree to a depth of 10cm. This will ensure there are no weeds to compete with the tree in its early years and reduce the evaporation of any water you apply to irrigate the tree. Keep the area immediately around the trunk clear of mulch to protect the root collar from being 'scorched'.

STEP FOUR

Where support is needed, use a single round, wooden stake. The tree should be attached with a single tree tie at a third of the overall height of the tree. Remember, when banging in the stake during planting, that it will have to be removed at the end of the first year.

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Tree maintenance in the first year

After planting, the following two to three years of maintenance are essential to ensure that the tree establishes successfully. Keep a close eye on the tree and where necessary take the following measures:

WATERING

It cannot be over-emphasised how important it is to provide water to newly planted trees, keeping them stress-free, especially during periods of dry weather. Don't water so much that they come to rely on you, but enough to encourage them to go in search of more.

TREE STAKES AND TIES

If all the planting steps are followed the tree will get off to a good start and healthy growth will soon follow. The tree tie should be slackened throughout the year as it tightens and the stake removed before the following growing season.

WEED CONTROL

Keep the 1.5 metre diameter tree circle clear of weeds at all times either by hand or mulch to eliminate competition. Don't use a strimmer as these de-bark trees at the root collar and ultimately kill them.

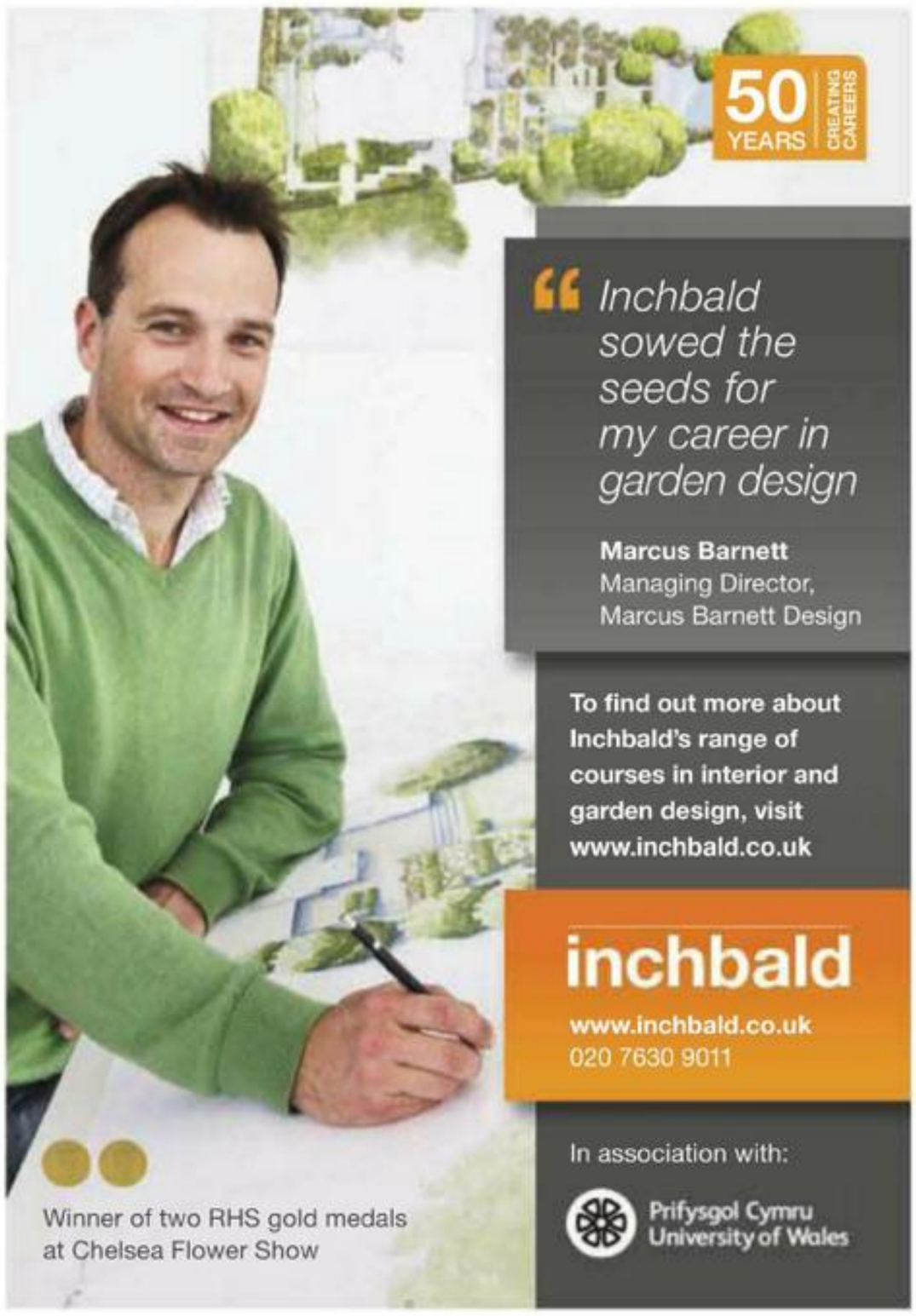
FORMATIVE PRUNING

Start early, preferably in winter, using secateurs to shape the tree. You may want to remove a twin leader to prevent the crown breaking out later in life, or to take out the lower feathers, revealing a clean trunk.

FEEDING

This is not necessary in the first year of planting, as the mulch will provide nutrients to the newly expanding root system. By the second season any roots damaged during planting will have repaired themselves and applying an organic fertiliser will benefit the tree.□

• Thanks to the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, for allowing us to take the photographs used in this feature.
For visitor information, call 020 8332 5655 or see the website at www.kew.org



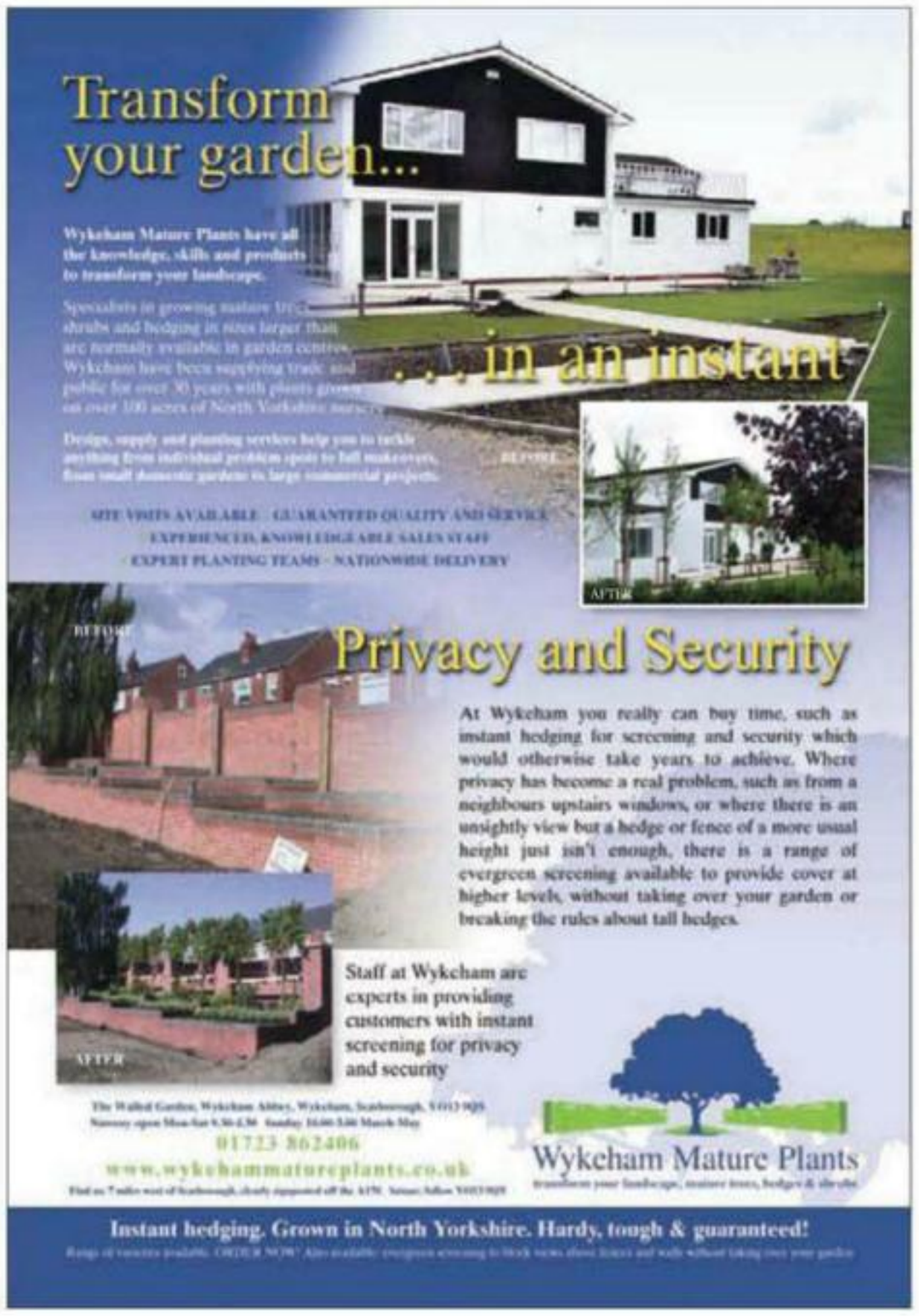


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PHOTO BY MATTEO PIAZZA, COURTESY OF THE AMERICAN SOCIETY OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS

This spectacular pool garden has won its designers a major award – turn the page for more details.

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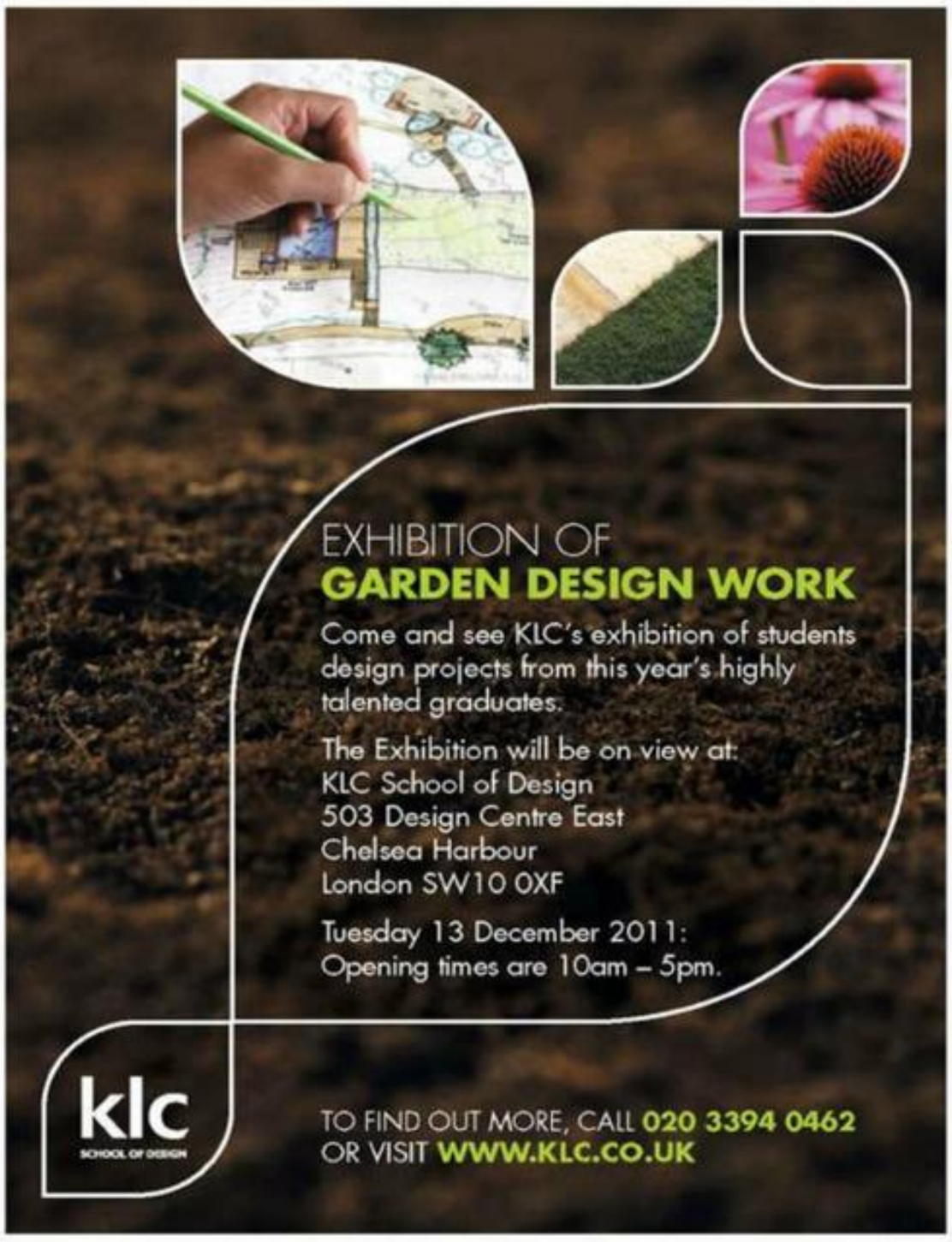
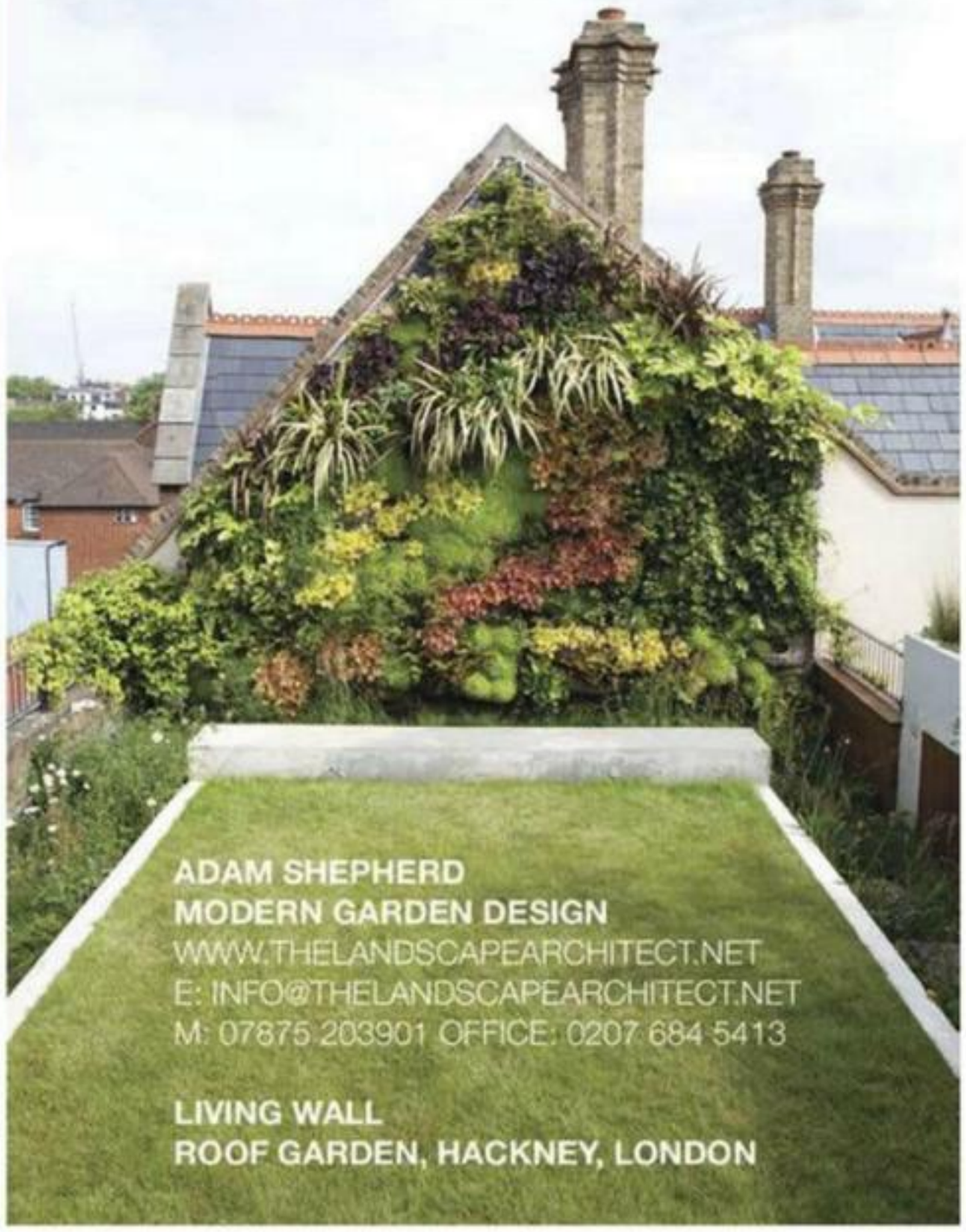


GARDEN DESIGNERS



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News

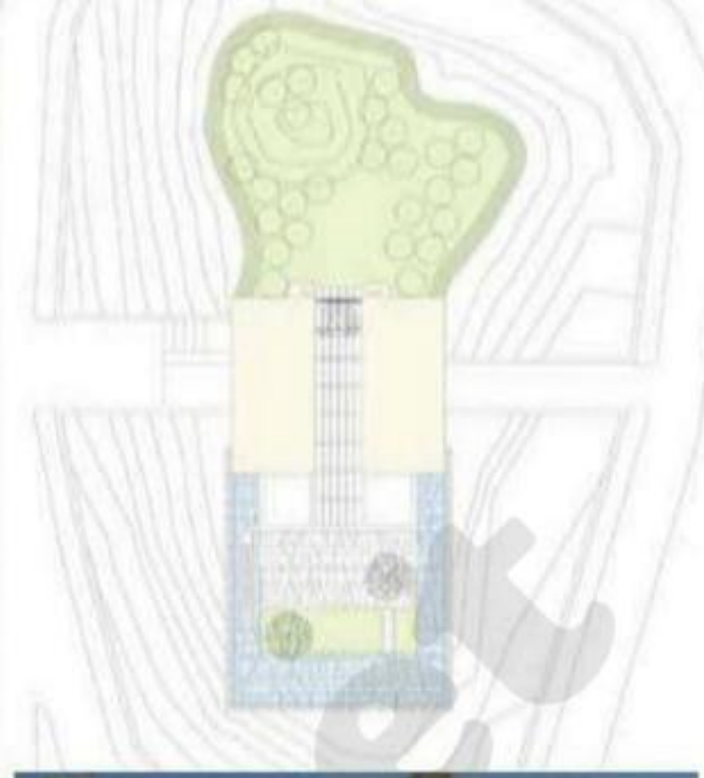
COMPILED BY ANNIE GATTI

A serene water garden defines the space in front of the house, high in the Lebanese mountains.

PHOTO BY MATTEO PIAZZA, COURTESY OF THE AMERICAN SOCIETY OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS

MOUNTAIN RETREAT TAKES PRIZE

Lebanese firm Vladimir Djurovic Landscape Architecture was the only non-American practice to win an Honor Award in the residential design category of this year's American Society of Landscape Architects professional awards. The design for the Salame Residence, a family house on a steep site 2,700m above sea level, created a granite terrace framed by a pool and an informal, green space at the back. The full list of awards is at www.asla.org



INSTANT TRADITION

A new range of landscaping products reproduced from originals at National Trust gardens brings a lived-in look to the garden. Paving slabs and tiles, such as the Hidcote Flagstone and the terracotta Chedworth Tiles, are made in Shropshire by Westminster Stone with reconstituted and reclaimed stone. Shingles and gravels are also sourced in the UK. Paving £48 per sq m; 900kg gravel (covers 10-12 sq m) £180; Cotswold Trough £100. www.nationaltrustpaving.com

A DIFFERENT ANGLE ON POTS

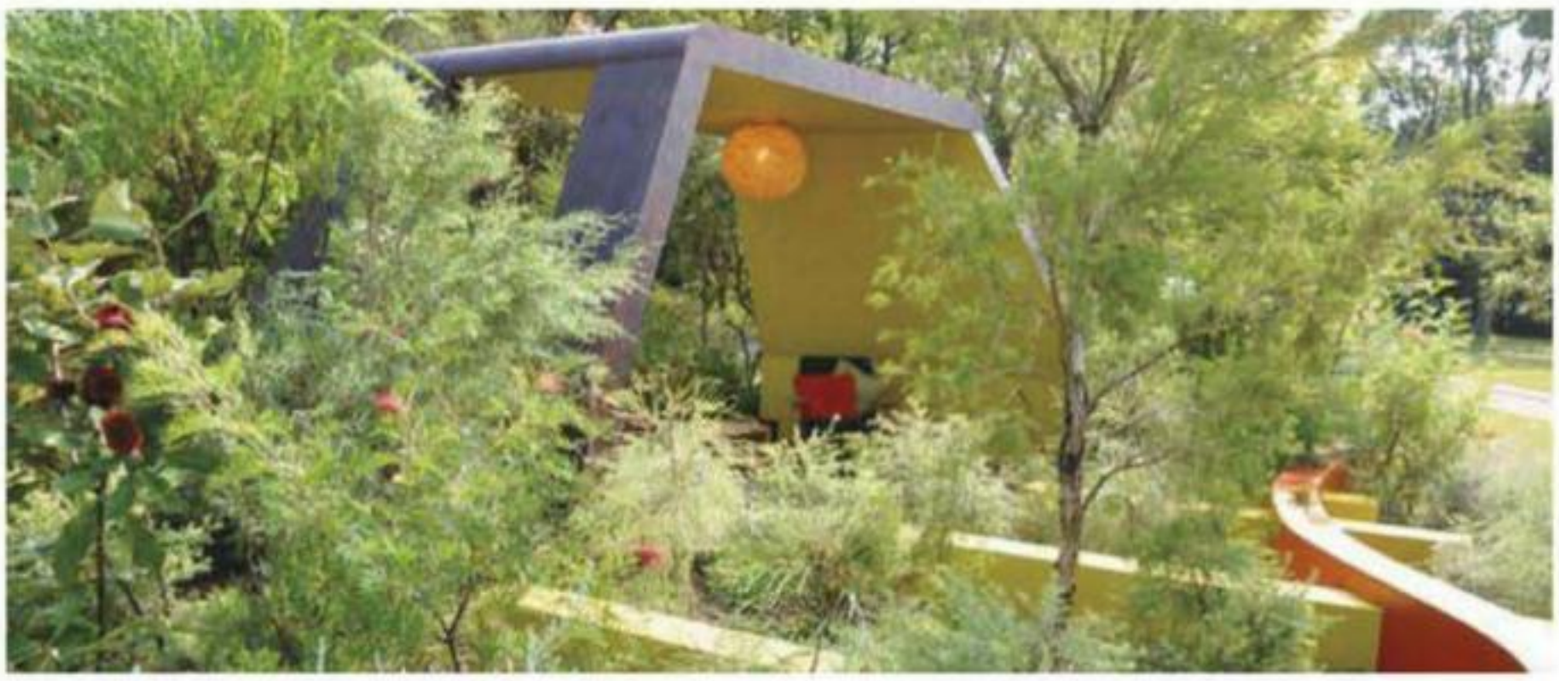
The crisp lines of these many-faceted, moulded terracotta pots by designer Nick Fraser would make a striking element in a sheltered contemporary courtyard or on a sunny kitchen windowsill. 17cm high by 17cm wide; £28 each, including terracotta tray and free UK delivery. www.nickfraser.co.uk

• A discount of 15% is available to GARDENS ILLUSTRATED readers on orders made by 18 December 2011, by entering the code HERB.

CITY SQUARE HOSTS COAST

Dorset's Jurassic Coast is the inspiration behind a multi-media installation in central London. "It is a contemporary – and glamourised – version of a picturesque landscape," explains artist Tony Heywood, who made the work with Alison Condie. Berkeley Square, W1, until 20 January 2012.

Australian designer Jim Fogarty won Best in Show at the Gardening World Cup in Nagasaki for his Bushfire garden (below). A celebration of the native and exotic plants that have adapted to bushfires, the design is laid out around a low walls in fiery shades. An open-sided arbour is a restful, shady sitting area by a simple, two-tiered pool, surrounded by drought-tolerant silver and green shrubs and trees.



SHOCK OF THE NEW

The winner of the Pylon Design Competition to find a 21st-century pylon to transmit energy across the UK is the T-Pylon (pictured right) by Danish firm Bystrup Architecture Design and Engineering. The simple tower with tapering 'arms' is shorter and lighter than the current lattice towers and is available painted, galvanized, in corten or stainless steel. Also singled out were the Totem by New Town Studio and the Silhouette by Iain Ritchie Architects. The National Grid says it wants to do further work with these designs too.

Notebook

• The **Jo Yeates Memorial Garden fund** has been set up for the construction of a garden that celebrates the life of the young Bristol landscape architect, who was murdered in 2010. The Landscape Institute and Sir Harold Hillier Gardens are collaborating to make a permanent garden in her name. To donate, visit www.landscapeinstitute.org/about/JoYeatesMemorial.php

• A one-day **workshop on Garden Writing**, organised by the Society of Garden Designers and led by Jackie Bennett, takes place at Leeds Met on 7 Dec. www.sgd.org.uk.

• **A three-day Design Masterclass with John Brookes**, aimed at designers or advanced students, takes place at the English Gardening School in Chelsea Wharf, London, on 19 and 26 Jan and 2 Feb. Tel 020 7352 4347, www.englishgardeningschool.co.uk

• **A new part-time Introduction to Garden Design course** starts at KLC School of Design in Hampton Court Palace on 26 April. Lectures and workshops take place over ten weeks. Fee £1,099. To book, call 020 7376 3377. www.klc.co.uk

• The 18th-century **Crystal Grotto at Painshill Park** in Surrey is to be restored using minerals and crystal-studded stalactites, thanks to a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund. Visitors will be able to view the restoration at various times. www.painshill.co.uk

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Supply, Plant, Relocate

1 Two-in-one

We removed a wall and part of the tiled roof of this outhouse to make an open-plan space that is a greenhouse at one end and a potting shed the other. It's well-organised and productive, but also lovely to sit in.

2

2 Lean-to

This is my all-time favourite greenhouse. It is attached to a large brick bothy and sits in the centre of the wonderful triangular walled kitchen garden at Kelmarsh Hall in Northamptonshire.

3 Fitting in naturally

A free-standing greenhouse adds merit to the vegetable growing area of an Oxfordshire garden. Painting greenhouses white can look rather stark, so consider using a chalky grey-white paint, in the Victorian manner. A linseed-oil based paint will help feed the wood.

3

4

4 Cold frames

The greenhouse at Guanock, my last garden, with cold frames ranged along the front. Cold frames go hand in hand with greenhouses, providing a transitional environment that's used for hardening-off seedlings and cuttings before planting in the open.

1 BRITT WILLOUGHBY DYER 2 KRISTY RAMAGE 3 JASON INGRAM (THE MILL HOUSE SHOOT) 4 WILLIAM DOLLINSON

Arne Maynard is a leading garden designer based in London and Monmouthshire

Greenhouses & potting sheds

A sheltered place is vital for garden tasks such as potting and propagating – and has its own charm, especially in winter

WORDS ARNE MAYNARD

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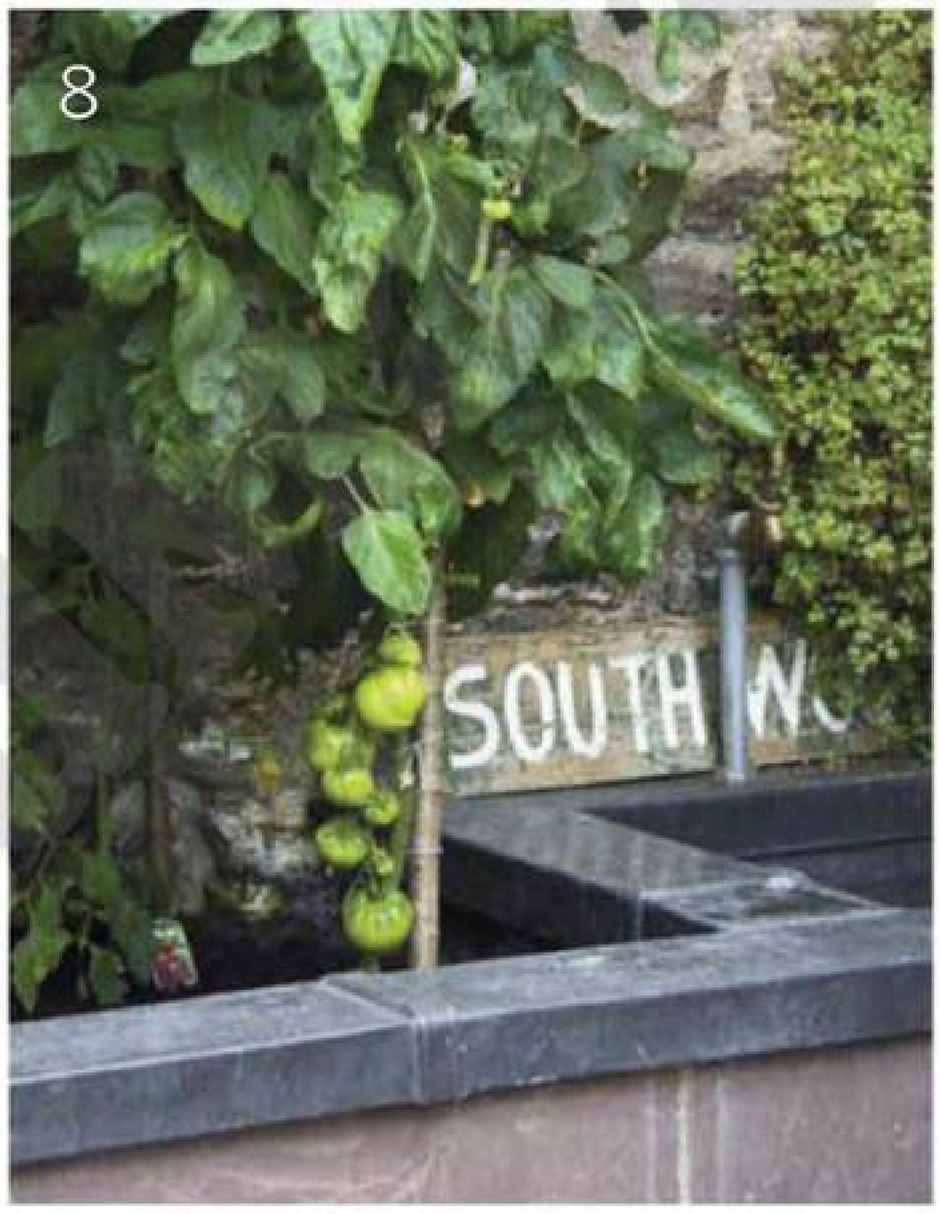

5&6 NICK HAND 7&8 BRITT WILLOUGHBY DYER

5-6 Good husbandry

A potting shed needs adequate storage for pots and tools. It can also be an alluring place, with bundles of fragrant lavender, old terracotta pots, tins labelled for seed and bales of garden twine.

7 Fit for purpose

Staging made from turned oak was built into the greenhouse (see picture 1) and a lead-lined tray fitted with a self-watering mechanism. Beneath the staging there's a broad shelf for resting pots and cans and for drying out bulbs after they've flowered.

8 Built-in bed

Because this greenhouse had no planting beds we built a block-work wall, which we lined with stone and finished with a lead capping detail. This forms a deep planting trough, which is filled with compost and used for growing tomatoes.

The great joy of a greenhouse is that it allows you to garden throughout the year, propagating, growing-on and growing produce ahead of the season, whether it's strawberries for Easter or early tomatoes. Outside, it may be cold and pouring with rain, but you can carry on working.

A good-looking greenhouse has architectural value. I'm passionate about old wooden Victorian greenhouses, and if I'm designing a garden where there's one that can be salvaged and restored, that's the first thing I'll do. But if I'm designing from new, whether it's a lean-to or a free-standing structure, I'll always build in wood and, whenever possible, commission a local carpenter to do the construction. Depending on the context, wooden greenhouses can be left natural or painted white, and my personal preference is for painting them, because it makes the structure appear lighter. That's important, particularly if it's a large greenhouse. While it's true that wooden greenhouses require regular maintenance to keep them in good condition, from the aesthetic point of view I think it's well worth making the investment.

Before buying a greenhouse or having one built, it's important to think of how you want to use it: is it to be a resource for raising food crops or a place to grow a particular group of plants such as alpines or species pelargoniums. ▷

9 Using the space

In my old greenhouse, I built brick staging for cuttings and seedlings, and in the middle had a big display table for species pelargoniums. Galvanised pots of tomatoes and basil moved from floor to staging when the seedlings went out and the interior was kept lime-washed for coolness and light.

Stockists/Suppliers

Baileys is a great source of old pots and galvanised buckets, string and lovely jars for storage. It also has beautiful old tables and workbenches suitable for the potting shed – or for dining in the greenhouse. Call in if you are near Ross-on-Wye (there is a fabulous café open at the weekends, definitely worth a trip) or check the website for mail order. Tel 01989 561931, www.baileyshomeandgarden.com

Linseed oil paint

The paints we use for greenhouses are made by Holkham Hall in Norfolk – they have a great range of colours and smell wonderful. The extra effort needed to apply them rewards you with much less maintenance in the future. Tel 01328 711348, www.holkhamlinseedpaints.co.uk

WILLIAM COLLINSON

▷ Mixing types of plants that need different conditions can result in the spread of pests and diseases, so keeping a monoculture of sorts may be best.

Unlike a conservatory, a greenhouse is first and foremost a place for growing plants, but if there's room for a small table and chairs, it can also be a magical place for a summer meal, with the fruits of your labours around you and the intoxicating scent of moist earth and tomatoes.

Traditionally, the potting shed or bothy goes hand in hand with the greenhouse and the two are usually adjacent. A potting shed needs to be dry and functional, fitted with shelves and a work top. Besides being a place for storing pots and garden tools, it's a place for taking cuttings in autumn, sowing seeds in spring and pricking out seedlings. If you can fit an old wood-burning stove, you've got the perfect winter garden office.

In this cosy setting you can get on with your winter tasks: sorting out seeds, potting up bulbs for indoor forcing, writing plant labels or keeping a journal on what did or didn't do well in the garden over the past year. It's one of the great pleasures of this time of year – I become so immersed in the world of gardening that it's often dark outside before I realise it's time to go in for supper. □

NEXT TIME *Design ideas* returns in February, when Arne looks at planting in jewel-like colours.

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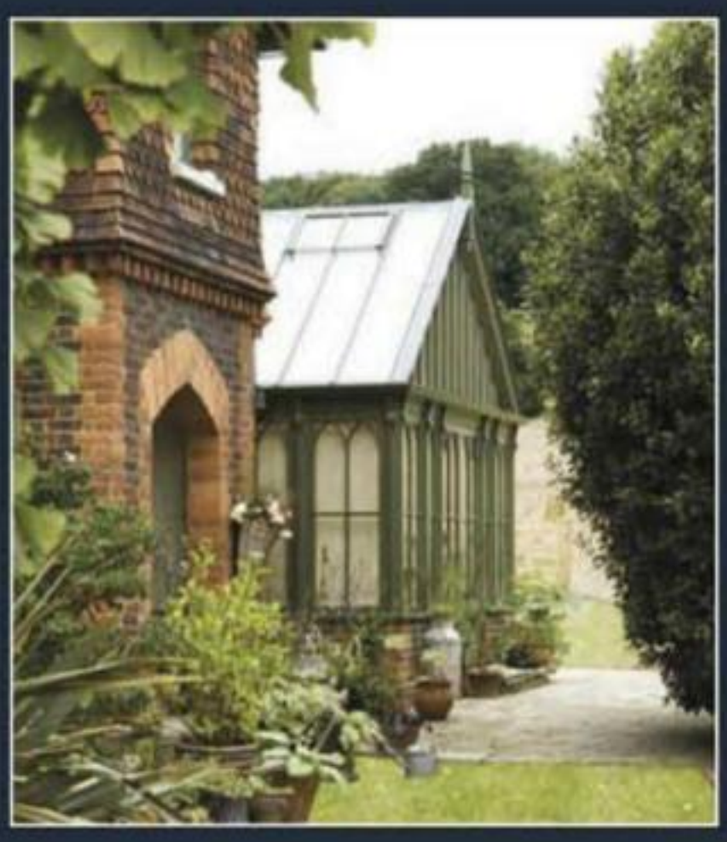

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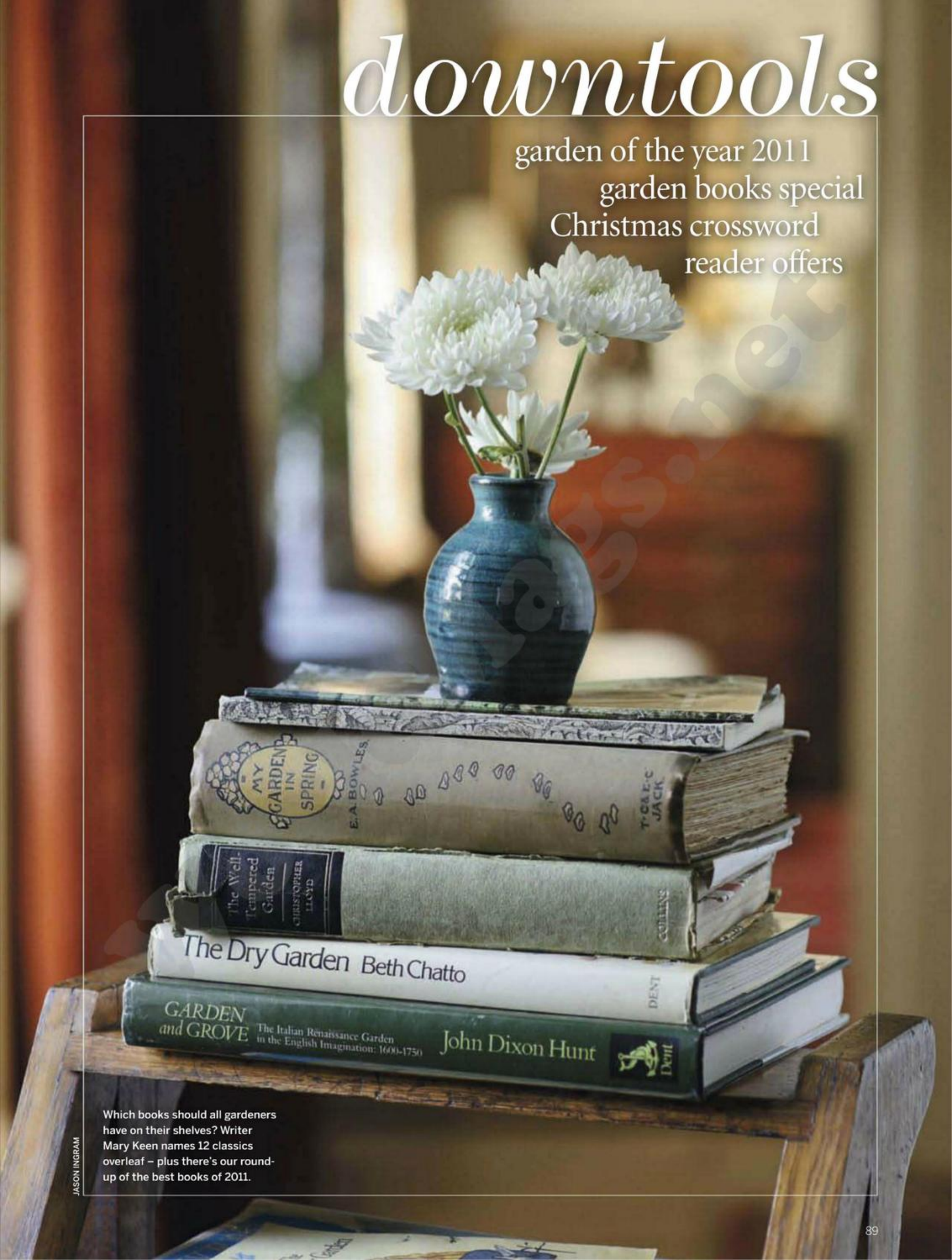


JASON INGRAM

Which books should all gardeners have on their shelves? Writer Mary Keen names 12 classics overleaf – plus there's our round-up of the best books of 2011.

Books special

Christmas classics

What are the ultimate gardening books for advice and inspiration? Writer Mary Keen names her 12 favourites

PHOTOGRAPHS **JASON INGRAM**

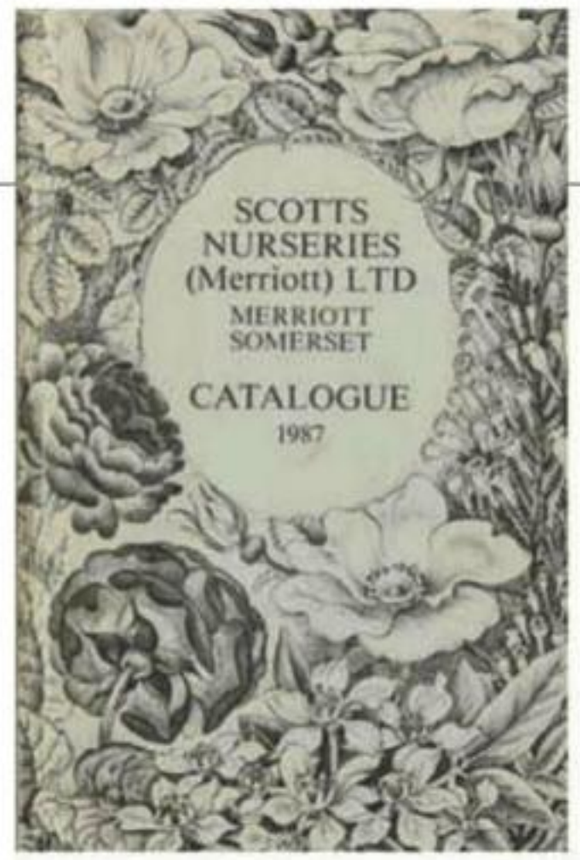
There are too many gardening books and now that looking things up has become so easy on the internet, I find I reach more rarely for the shelves. But there are some books that I would always want to keep, less perhaps for reference, than for inspiration and guidance. I will always cross the room and stand on the arm of the armchair to prise one of these out of my much-too-large collection of all sorts of books. Even operating a one-in, one-out policy barely keeps our pages within bounds, because garden lit must share the space with all the other books we read.

BEST FOR BEGINNERS

Scotts Nurseries Catalogue 1987

Virtually unobtainable – sorry – but irresistible, because I read it in the bath for years when I started to be gripped by gardens, is Scotts Nurseries Catalogue illustrated by Robin Tanner in black and white. There are old roses on the cover and spindly shapes of trees and shrubs within, so that you could tell how high or wide something would be. Planting advice and distances for hedging, suggestions for every month of the year and for 'tight corners' as well as mouthwatering descriptions of the old roses that I wanted to grow in a Tennysonian Lincolnshire rectory. It provided all

Mary Keen is a garden designer, lecturer and writer who contributes regularly to *The Telegraph*.



I needed to know. Catalogues still make good reading for beginners.

BEST FOR TAKING GARDENS INTO A DIFFERENT LEAGUE

In Your Garden

by Vita Sackville-West

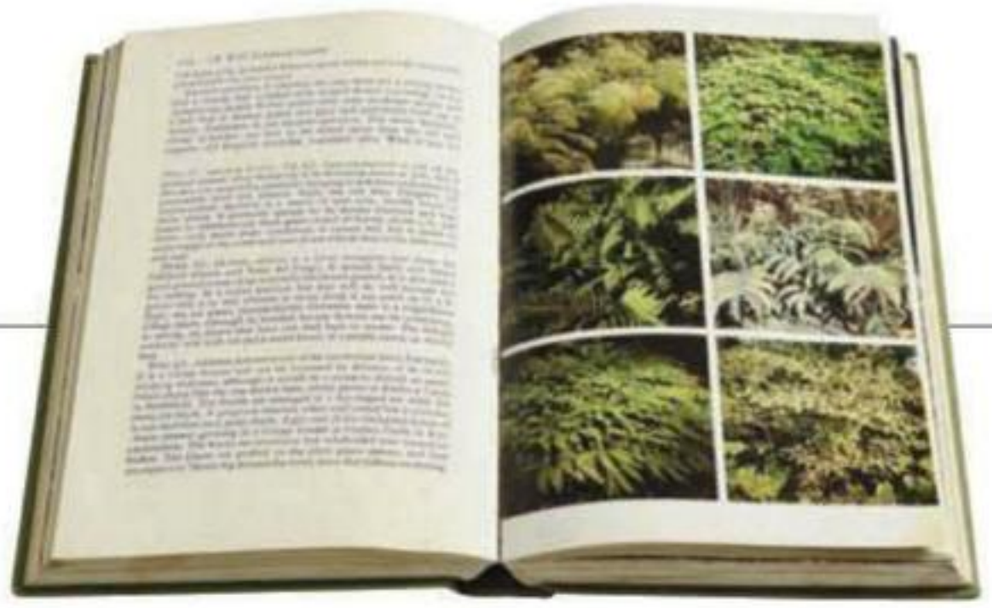
I started young and most of my friends in their 20s were puzzled by my obsession with such a middle-aged, cardigan-wearing, mud-on-the-spade hobby. They wanted conversations about books and art, and Vita Sackville-West's writing on gardens bridged that gap for me. Although she can be down to earth (proved by the stout shoes and breeches she wore – with jewels) she made me see that gardening had links with the poetry and painting that I loved. I still read her when I want to remind myself that making gardens is artistic and creative work. I like the old volumes rather than the newer collection. *In Your Garden* is a good start.

BEST FOR KNOWLEDGE

Perennial Garden Plants

by Graham Stuart Thomas

Graham Stuart Thomas spent his life in the study of plants. His *Perennial Plants* beats the internet for concise and useful facts about any plant you might want to grow. Some of the varieties he mentions have been superseded, but because he advised the National Trust on gardens all over England, his



experience of growing plants under all sorts of different conditions remains unchallenged. I still use his lists of plants for different seasons.

BEST FOR CONTROVERSY

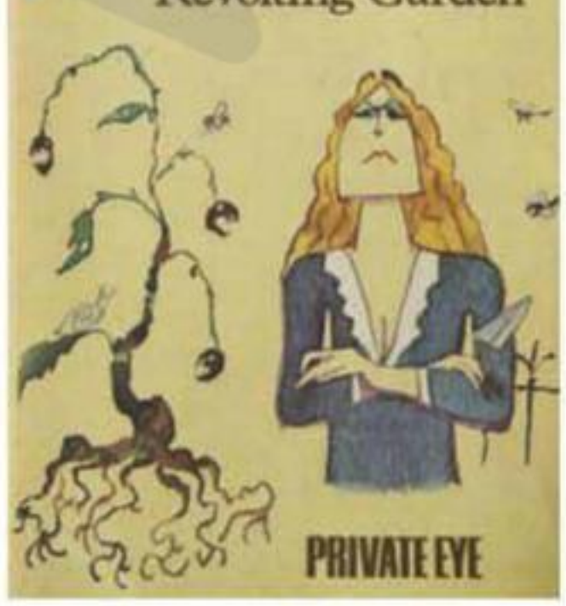
***The Well-Tempered Garden* by Christopher Lloyd**

Christopher Lloyd was the arch tease. But he did make us take another look at plants we thought we hated. *Aucuba*, anyone? And he also questioned received wisdom. 'Lavender,' he wrote, 'is one of our most cherished eyesores, only less drab than the beds of thorny sticks that it so often encloses.' I love all his books but *The Well-Tempered Garden* is the one I most often return to for an honest opinion on a new plant I am thinking of growing, or for advice on where to put it.

BEST FUNNY BOOK

***The Revolting Garden* by Rose Blight**

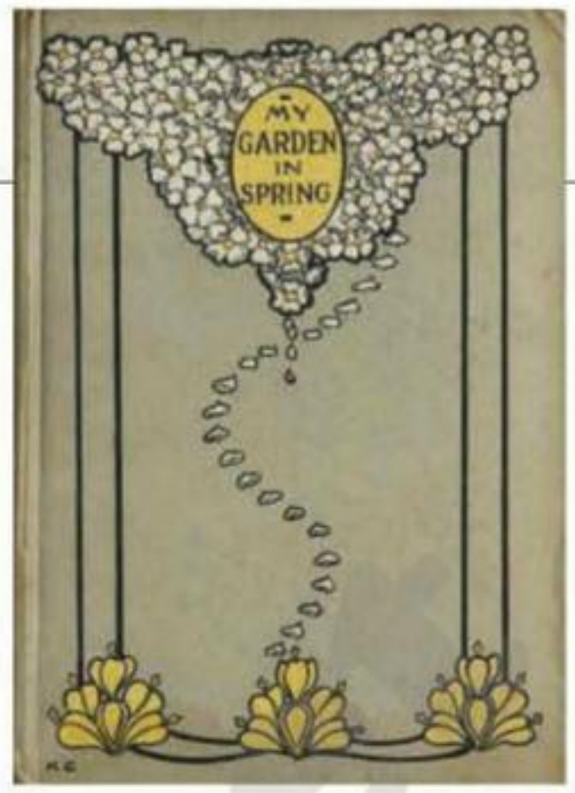
Germaine Greer wrote a column for *Private Eye* for years called *The Revolting Garden*, under the name Rose Blight. Her collection of blackly humorous writing has been a good way of countering too much artiness. Gardening is a frustrating and unpredictable occupation and it helps to know that others fail too. Especially in towns. Coping with drunks, punks, cats and builders is only half of the book. The acid descriptions of two kinds of Italian Revolting garden or the auto garden make me laugh every time I read them. Written in 1979 it is surprising how modern this little book seems. Germaine Greer was growing 'Bishop of Llandaff' long before most of us had rediscovered dahlias.



BEST FOR THE EXCITEMENT OF SPRING

***My Garden in Spring* by EA Bowles**

This makes enthusiastic winter reading for the gardener impatient



for spring. EA Bowles seems to have been out in all weathers, watching his bulbs as they nose through hard ground. 'It is marvellous what power lies in the growing shoot of a crocus,' he writes, so that you want to go out to witness the same thing for yourself. He is particularly observant about snowdrops and his collection would have impressed today's galanthophiles, although he did not share their fondness for yellow snowdrops, which he thought sounded abominable. ▷

“Gardening is a frustrating and unpredictable occupation and it helps to know that others fail too”

on Mary's list

In Your Garden* by Vita Sackville-West (Michael Joseph, 1951; also Frances Lincoln, 2004, ISBN 978-0711223547).

Perennial Garden Plants* by Graham Stuart Thomas (Dent, 1976; also Frances Lincoln, 2004, ISBN 978-0711224032).

The Well-Tempered Garden by Christopher Lloyd (Collins, 1978; also Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2003, ISBN 978-1841882222).

The Revolting Garden by Rose Blight/Germaine Greer (Deutsch/Private Eye, 1979, ISBN 978-0233971797).

The Education of a Gardener by Russell Page (Collins, 1962; also Harvill, 2004, ISBN 978-1860460425).

My Garden in Spring by EA Bowles (T C & E C Jack, 1914; also Timber Press, 2008, ISBN 978-1604690415).

The Dry Garden* by Beth Chatto (W&N, 1981; also Orion, 1998, ISBN 978-0752816425).

Helen Dillon's Garden Book* by Helen Dillon (Frances Lincoln, 2007, ISBN 978-0711227101).

Flowers and their Histories by Alice M Coats (A&C Black, 1968, ISBN 978-0713609011).

Garden and Grove by John Dixon Hunt (JM Dent, 1986, ISBN 978-0460046817).

Le Jardin Plume by Joëlle Mayer & Gilles Le Scanff (Les Editions Eugen Ulmer, 2008, ISBN 978-2841383399).

* Turn to *Special offer prices for readers* on page 93 to order marked books at reduced prices, and with free postage and packing.

OUT OF PRINT BOOKS

Some of these books are now out of print, but secondhand copies may be ordered through major online book retailers or try a specialist service such as Mike Park Books, tel 020 8641 7796, email mikeparkbooks@aol.com

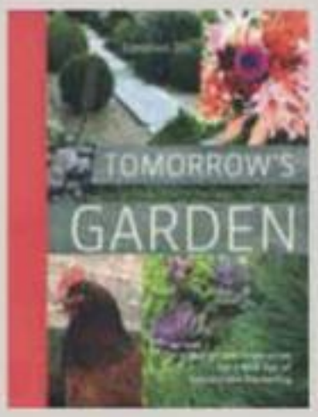
GARDENS ILLUSTRATED's *10 favourite books of 2011*

THE GARDEN SOURCE: Inspirational design ideas for gardens and landscapes
by Andrea Jones
'This is a stunning book, which features many important gardens of the past decade or more.'* Review *Annie Guilfoyle*
Eight Books, £25 – *offer price £23*
ISBN 978-0955432279

WILD FLOWERS
by Sarah Raven
'The best wild flower book I've encountered in a long time... The photos are inspirational ... [the] text is peppered with insights... Highly recommended.'* *Dr Phil Gates*
Bloomsbury, £50 – *offer price £45*
ISBN 978-1408813942

COLOUR IN THE GARDEN
by Val Bourne
'A super source of inspiration and advice, and a great book for those who want to extend the colour in their garden into new seasons'. *Matthew Wilson*
Merrell, £18.95 – *offer price £17.50*
ISBN 978-1858945477

OUR PLOT
by Cleve West
'Filled with hints, tips and stories of allotment life... not just about growing food but about multicultural harmony... an absolute joy to read'. *Matthew Biggs*
Frances Lincoln, £20 – *offer price £18*
ISBN 978-0711232365



TOMORROW'S GARDEN
by Stephen Orr
'Design and inspiration are to the fore here... Beautifully written, visually coherent, impeccably well informed... this is a book of international stature'. *Rob Cassy*
Rodale, £17.99 – *offer price £16.19*
ISBN 978-1605294681

LANDSCAPES IN LANDSCAPES
by Piet Oudolf with Noël Kingsbury
'Perhaps *the* landmark book by a historically significant designer and wildly knowledgeable plantsman'. *Rob Cassy*
Thames & Hudson, £35 – *offer price £32.50*. ISBN 978-0500289464

MODERN DESIGN IN PROVENCE: Nicole de Vésian – Gardens
by Louisa Jones
'Perfectly describes [Nicole's] philosophy of garden-making... A book that is as stylish and restrained as its subject.' *Mary Keen*
Actes Sud, €33
ISBN 978-2742797349

THE ART OF CREATIVE PRUNING
by Jake Hobson
'Unexpectedly entertaining... with at times jaw-dropping examples.... the book is full of down-to-earth practical advice, with clear diagrams'. *Stephanie Donaldson*
Timber Press, £25 – *offer price £23*
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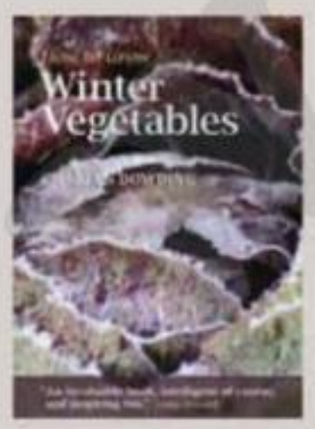

HOW TO GROW WINTER VEGETABLES
by Charles Dowding
'Written by a man who knows and loves his vegetables... this fabulous book is ideal for those seeking to extend their basic knowledge and experience.' *Matthew Biggs*
Green Books, £14.95 – *offer price £13.95*
ISBN 978-1900322881

HOME GROUND: Sanctuary in the city
by Dan Pearson
'A garden designer of international repute... whose every written word conveys love and knowledge of his subject... required reading'. *David Wheeler*
Conran Octopus, £28 – *offer price £25.50*
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GARDEN OF THE YEAR 2011

GARDENS ILLUSTRATED

LEN SEPHTON

Worthing Sea Front Planting Schemes

NOMINATED BY ANNE JENNINGS, GARDEN WRITER

Any Garden of the Year should measure up aesthetically and emotionally. While being 'of the moment', it should also have a sense of longevity and substance. It has to form a lasting impression and provide a significant landscape for others to enjoy.

Worthing sea front planting may not be cutting edge or high profile, but it is significant. More than any other horticultural body, parks departments have the opportunity to bring first-class planting schemes into the public realm.

Worthing has upgraded the quality of its planting in a truly sustainable way, and at the same time reduced the maintenance budget by £18,000 a year. If other local authorities would rise to the challenge with similar creative response, our town and cityscapes, and our relationship with them, would be transformed.

ADDRESS Worthing, West Sussex. OPEN Daily.

"Any Garden of the Year should measure up aesthetically and emotionally... it should also have a sense of longevity"

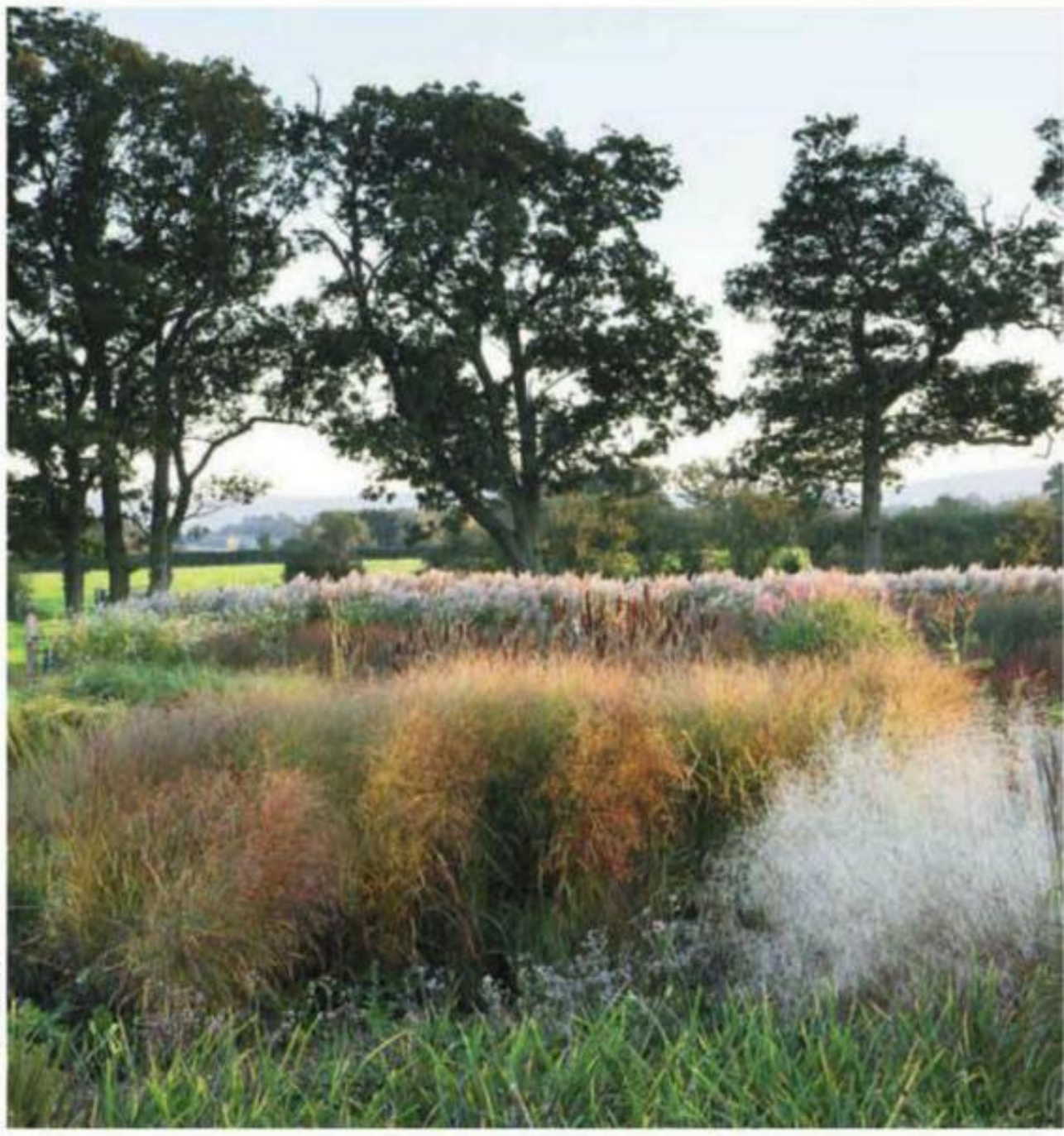
ANNE JENNINGS

Sussex Prairies

NOMINATED BY JOANNA FORTNAM, GARDEN WRITER

The ideas brought together in this young garden (now in its fourth year) encapsulate a certain contemporary mood. Paul and Pauline McBride worked with the influential Dutch designer Piet Oudolf in Europe and have distilled his influence in a confident and exuberant way in a rural English setting. They fashioned Sussex Prairies from a farm that was too small (at 35 acres) to provide a living, but along with all their other enterprises (B&B, rare breeds, cut flowers, outdoor art), it provides a hub for a sustainable business. The garden is gaining a word-of-mouth reputation for its beautifully crafted planting combinations and long season of interest. It is also an example of how two resourceful, gifted people can carve a life out of the countryside, and put a garden at the centre of their world.

ADDRESS Morlands Farm, Wheatsheaf Road, Henfield, West Sussex BN5 9AT. OPEN 1 June to 14 October 2012, daily, 1pm to 5pm. TEL 01273 495902 WEBSITE www.sussexprairies.co.uk



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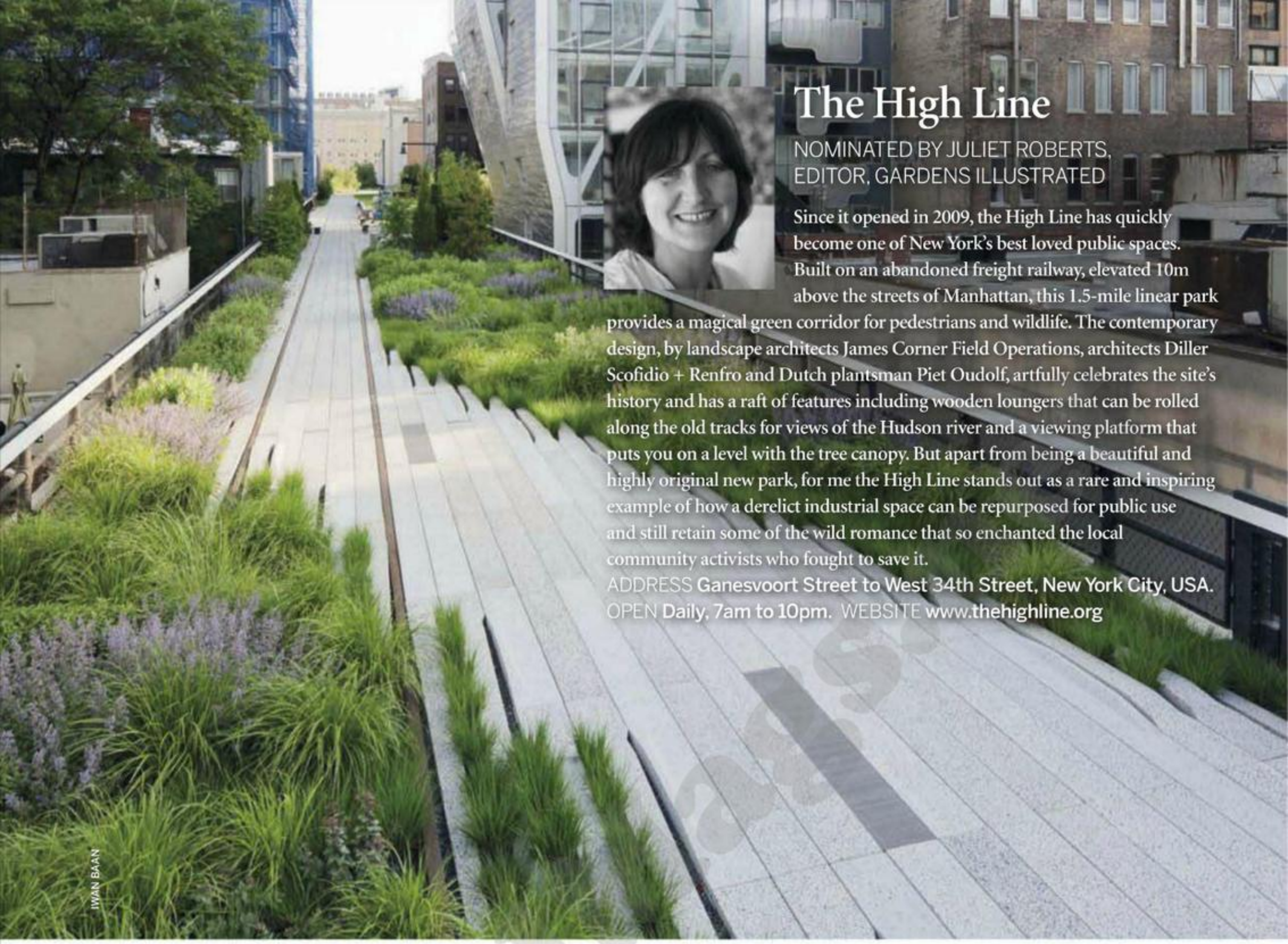
IWAN BAAN

The High Line

NOMINATED BY JULIET ROBERTS, EDITOR, GARDENS ILLUSTRATED

Since it opened in 2009, the High Line has quickly become one of New York's best loved public spaces. Built on an abandoned freight railway, elevated 10m above the streets of Manhattan, this 1.5-mile linear park provides a magical green corridor for pedestrians and wildlife. The contemporary design, by landscape architects James Corner Field Operations, architects Diller Scofidio + Renfro and Dutch plantsman Piet Oudolf, artfully celebrates the site's history and has a raft of features including wooden loungers that can be rolled along the old tracks for views of the Hudson river and a viewing platform that puts you on a level with the tree canopy. But apart from being a beautiful and highly original new park, for me the High Line stands out as a rare and inspiring example of how a derelict industrial space can be repurposed for public use and still retain some of the wild romance that so enchanted the local community activists who fought to save it.

ADDRESS Ganesvoort Street to West 34th Street, New York City, USA.
OPEN Daily, 7am to 10pm. WEBSITE www.thehighline.org

Phoenix Garden

NOMINATED BY HOWARD SOOLEY, GARDEN PHOTOGRAPHER

I have visited a great number of gardens in 2011, so I had to think long and hard which to choose as my Garden of the Year. I eventually settled on Phoenix Garden, off Charing Cross road in central London. Visually it's not the most stunning garden nor the most designed, but for me it is the living embodiment of what a garden actually *is*.

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HOWARD SOOLEY

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TO ENTER

Answer the following question and send it, along with your name, address, postcode and phone number to GARDENS ILLUSTRATED 180/MyGardenSchool, PO Box 51, Leicester LE94 0AA. Or enter online at www.gardensillustrated.com

Question: What is the botanical name for holly?

Closing date 31 December 2011.

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TERMS & CONDITIONS

for MyGardenSchool course competition (above) and Christmas crossword (page 100)

1 Promoter Immediate Media Company Bristol Limited. **2** Competition entrants must be aged 18 years. The Christmas crossword competition is open to UK residents only. Entrants to the MyGardenSchool competition must be residents of the UK or countries where entry is lawful. Both competitions exclude entries from the promoter's employees. **3** By entering, you agree to be bound by all the rules of the promotion. **4** Only one entry per person allowed. **5** No responsibility accepted for lost, delayed, ineligible or fraudulent entries. **6** The closing date for the MyGardenSchool competition is 11.59pm on 31 December 2011. Closing date for entries to the Christmas crossword is 11.59pm on 15 January 2012. **7** Five MyGardenSchool winners and one Christmas crossword winner will be chosen at random from all eligible entries. **8** Winners will be notified 60 days of the closing date for each competition. **9** The draw is final and no correspondence will be entered into. **10** For details of the winners, check www.gardensillustrated.com within two months of the closing date. If any winner is unable to be contacted within one month of the closing date, the promoter will offer the prize to a runner-up. **11** The promoter reserves the right to substitute the prize for either competition with one of the same or greater value but there is no cash alternative. **12** Full Terms & Conditions at www.gardensillustrated.com

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Sea Thrift Flowers by Colin Roberts

SEAN MALYON

FROM GIFTS FOR GARDENERS, PAGES 24-29

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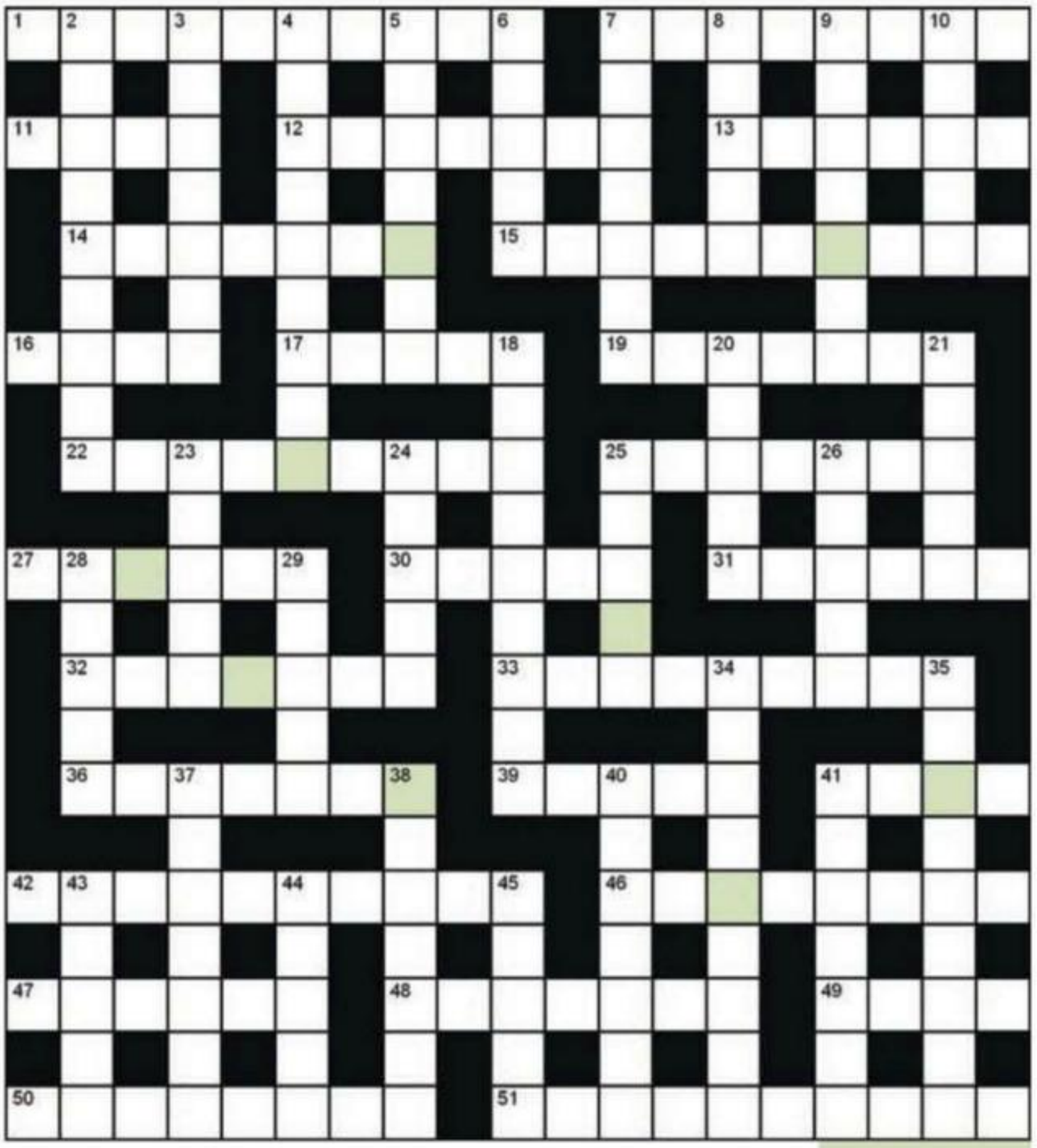
Christmas crossword



Solve our festive puzzle for gardeners and you could win a magnum of champagne

ACROSS

1 Christmas rose genus – 'Winter Sunshine' is our nurseryman's favourite (10)
7 Apply pesticide in vaporous form (8)
11 Sunken garden boundary – in undergrowth a hazard (2-2)
12 Hybrid of mandarin orange and pomelo – possibly get loan (7)
13/4 Wise men's guide to a yellow-flowering plant of the lily family? (4,2,9)
14 Bet Lisa re-arranged ornamental member of saxifrage family (7)
15 Genus of cinquefoil in *Rosaceae* family – 6/10ths of which is powerful! (10)
16 Insects in plant stalks (4)
17 Genus of clump-forming foliage plants has to change (5)
19 Pointedly made holes for seeds? (7)
22 Sadly harms last site where sea asters grow (4,5)
25 Tony, botanist and head of Kew's Arboretum (7)
27 eg protection for gardeners – a handy Christmas gift? (6)
30 Expanded caps of mushrooms... found in woodpile, increasingly (5)
31 Split a perennial for replanting (6)
32 Common name for *Verbascum* – nothing removed from damaged linoleum (7)
33 Evergreen rosette-shaped succulent makes Eric heave! (9)
36 Earthwork at Boughton House named after legendary Greek musician (7)
39 Animal's track said to be a means of fungi reproduction? (5)
41 A container eg for rainwater (4)
42 eg grow small shrubs beneath trees (10)
46 Oddly perceive our Nurseryman's favourite *V. tinus* (3,5)
47 A Saxifrage and Beethoven overture got men excited (6)
48 Genus of plants in *Protea* family – financial institutions get first class return (7)
49 Environment includes a mineral found in eg sprouts (4)
50 Peter, MD of Lost Gardens of Heligan, featured in *Who's who* (8)
51 Wild chervil changed by clay's power (3-7)

DOWN

2 Angela, use wild oleaster genus (9)
3 eg greenhouse constructions needing wall support (4-3)
4 See 13 across
5 Athletes in the vegetable patch? (7)
6 Use broom – to remove tea from sweet pea! (5)
7 As Somerset Lodge's topiary is in wintertime: touched by Jack? (7)
8 Mother and offspring stoneworker (5)
9 Icy, frozen – after end of evening, a lilac is spoilt (7)
10 A variety of *Ginkgo biloba* for a Scandinavian giant? (5)
18 Yarrows and milfoils – one swallowed by vulnerable Greek warrior! (9)
20 Wearied of some gazebo re-design (5)
21 Shaped like Eden Project's biomes (5)
23 eg area of flat land – whichever way you look at it (5)
24 Bring eg fruit to maturity (5)
25 *Rosa* 'Penelope __'; partly artichoke I think! (5)
26 Hang, kestrel-like, in the air (5)
28 A red-cupped narcissus– in a state of uncertainty? (5)
29 N. European's turnip-like vegetable (5)
34 Term indicating differently coloured zones on eg leaves (9)
35 Globular vegetable but not the Jerusalem sort? (9)
37 What to do with apple skin? (4,3)
38 Paved over eg part of the garden (7)
40 Scatter too many seeds... on top of pig!
41 Covers with earth, we hear, *Ilex* fruits, say (7)
43 Time of day when the ox-eye daisy blooms – odd thing! (5)
44 Paved area of garden in anticipation (5)
45 Herbal tea might be drunk as such a pick-me-up? (5)

WIN

When completed, the shaded squares of the crossword spell out a code word – the name of a Christmas evergreen. For a chance to **win a magnum of Laurent-Perrier champagne** (RRP £71.99), simply write the code word on a postcard with your name and address, and send to: Gardens Illustrated 180/ Christmas Crossword, PO Box 501, Leicester LE94 0AA, or enter online at www.gardensillustrated.com, before our closing date – 15 January, 2012. Sorry, open to UK readers only. For terms and conditions see page 98.

SOLUTIONS WILL BE PRINTED IN THE FEBRUARY 2012 ISSUE

NOVEMBER'S SOLUTIONS

ACROSS: 1 Roof garden; **7** Mite; **9** Narcissi; **10** *Sorbus*; **11** *Rhus*; **12** *Stipa*; **13** Leaf; **14** Spathes; **16** Floppy; **18** Lawson; **20** *Althaea*; **22** Able; **24** Morel; **26** Rock; **28** Isabel; **29** Nicotine; **30** Clod; **31** Sweet briar.
DOWN: 2 Orach; **3** *Fuchsia*; **4** Asses; **5** Daisies; **6** *Nyssa*; **7** Morello; **8** *Thuja*; **14/17** Sea pea; **16/15** Fat hen; **19** Seedbed; **20** Arrange; **21** Aerator; **23** Basil; **24** *Malus*; **25** Licit; **27** *Canna*.

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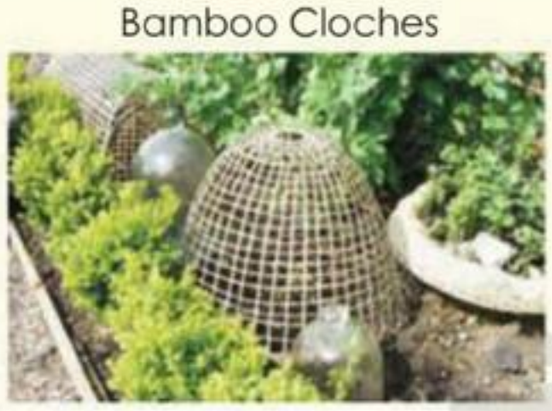

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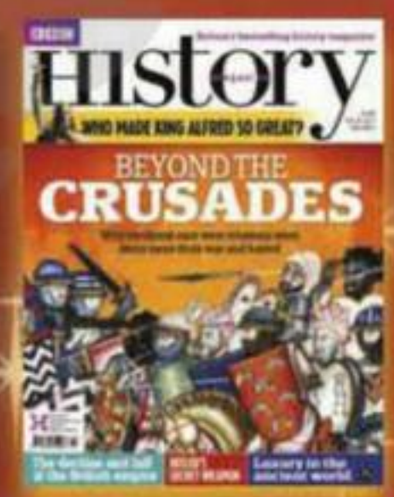

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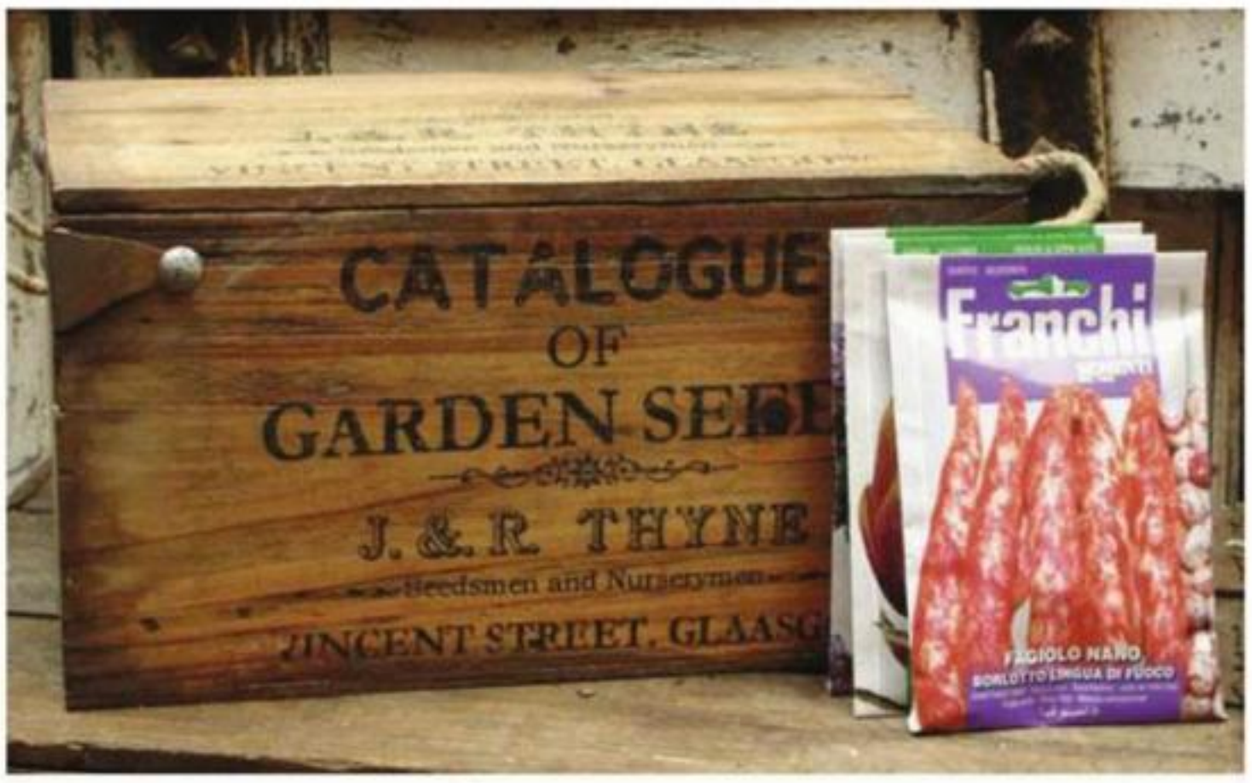

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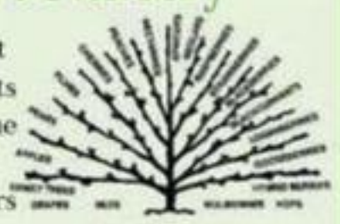

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ANNAÏCK GUITTENY

The final cut

Frank Ronan is a novelist who lives and gardens in Worcestershire

Finding the right moment to mow in December will help flowering meadow plants thrive in spring

WORDS FRANK RONAN ILLUSTRATION ANGELA HARDING

There is only one December job in this garden. It will take less than an hour, and then I am done for the year and can retire to gorging pastry by the fire and other seasonal rituals with a clear conscience. Not to say that there aren't extra jobs I could be doing, were I one of those hearty types who think nothing of cultivating rheumatism by flailing about in the crepuscular damp to give themselves a sense of accomplishment, performing tasks that could not only be put off until March but will probably need to be repeated in March anyway (I can more happily get my sense of accomplishment by making the pastry and poking the fire). What I mean is that there is only one job that must and will be done between the beginning of the month and Christmas, and if it is not then the rest of the year will be askew.

I know because last year it went undone, through no fault of mine, and I came to understand the importance of it. There was snow on the ground for much of December, which prevented me from giving the meadow a winter cut. Until then I had always performed it as a work of supererogation, not really believing that it would make much difference in the long run. I had been told, when I first began the meadow, that the shorter the grass when they appeared, the better the crocuses would look and, liking nothing better than looking at crocuses, had faithfully and annually shaved the sward to a quarter inch of its life in the brief interregnum between the solemnity of the last autumn crocus vanishing and the advent of the first crocus leaves appearing.

It must be left as late as possible for the greatest benefit, but a delay until the new year runs the risk of a massacre of those new crocus leaves camouflaged among the grass. A fine day is needed, without frost, when the drizzle has stopped for an hour at least and the ground become reasonably dry. That might never happen in January, but is not an unlikely occurrence in most Decembers, the last being a great exception. You must be ready for that moment and make no definite plans to be away from home until it is done. Afterwards you can allow yourself to be dragged off Christmas shopping, but before then you have an impeccable excuse to stay at home and watch the sky. Making pastry will help to pass the time.

"There is only one job that must be done between the beginning of the month and Christmas"

The great contradiction of a meadow is that you make it by fighting its essence. It is, by definition, a matrix of grasses that provides a vehicle for everything else you want to grow. The grasses want to dominate and have the place to themselves and your job is to weaken them into submission by starving the soil, by introducing parasites like yellow rattle and by mowing only when it is to the advantage of the other plants. The result is a form of gardening that gives maximum rewards for minimal effort. If you do nothing more than mow once a year in late summer you already have something a hundred times more lovely than any lawn.

The winter cut is what lifts a meadow into another class. Grass can do a lot of growing between September and spring, and it gets tufty and knotted and matted and catches dead leaves and feeds itself on them. By setting the blades low and wheeling out the mower now you are giving the meadow a head start that will have visible results all through next year. If we are under snow again there won't be much you can do about it, but I've already, with that in mind, given it an extra trim when I saw a fleeting gap between the last colchicum and the first saffron crocus. But I'll still be on the lookout for an hour of mowing weather between now and Christmas. □

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